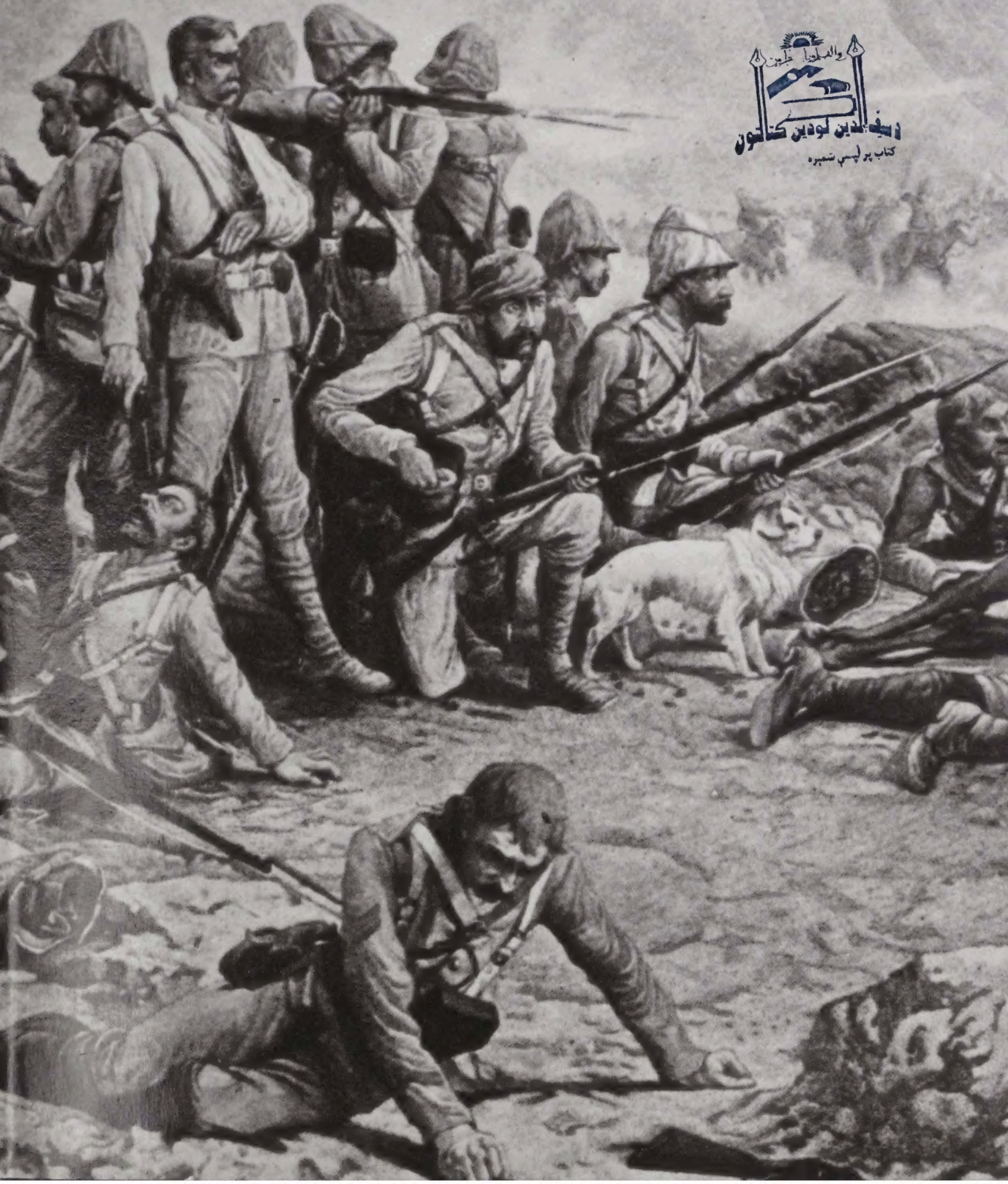


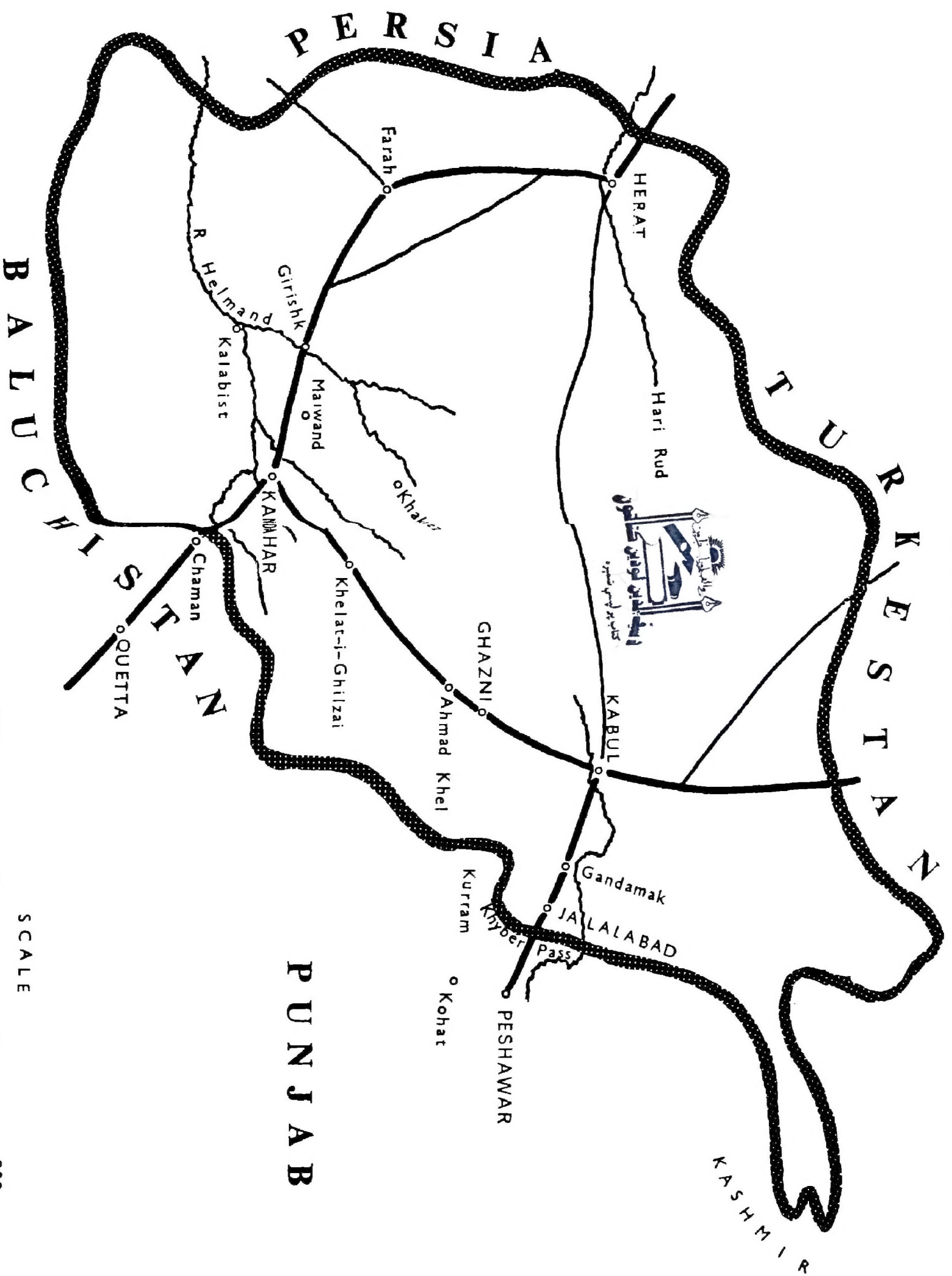
My God - MAIWAND!

OPERATIONS OF THE
SOUTH AFGHANISTAN
FIELD FORCE 1878-80

Leigh Maxwell



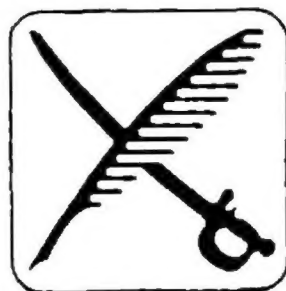
AFGHANISTAN



MY GOD-MAIWAND!

*Operations of the
South Afghanistan Field Force
1878-80*

BY
LEIGH MAXWELL



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To
The warriors of both sides
who fell at Maiwand

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Finally, I shall always remember how Colonel David Noel looked after me in Kabul, took me to Kandahar and drove me around the Maiwand Plain. Without his help, some of the most interesting features of the battle would not have come to light.

CHAPTER 1

Politics, Presidencies and Pathans

1

IT'S NO JOB for a soldier of the line to dig up graves and check who's buried in them. But if you have been through a bad battle yourself and seen your friends falling around you, unable to stop and bring their bodies in, then you feel that you have something to repay. So you do what you are told without grumbling – next time it might be yourself.

So may have thought the British soldiers and the sepoy of the 2nd Bombay Infantry Brigade in the evening before the last stage of their march from Kandahar to the battle-field of Maiwand. Although they had not taken part in that action themselves, they had been thoroughly blooded during the siege of Kandahar in the sortie to attack Deh Kwaja, a village and orchard complex held in strength by the Afghans. They had penetrated right in among the houses, but had to pull out again in the face of a resolute enemy in vastly superior numbers, and during the fighting withdrawal had been compelled to abandon many of their fallen comrades, even the body of the brigade commander. It was not until General Sir Frederick Roberts arrived with his Bengal Army division after the famous march from Kabul and dispersed the besiegers that they were able to return and gather up the remains of their friends. Now they were going to do the same for somebody else.

It was mid-September, 1880, and they were following back along the line of retreat taken by Brigadier-General Burrows's shattered brigades after their disastrous encounter with Sirdar Ayub Khan, Ruler of Herat, and his army on the desert plain west of the mud-brick fort at Maiwand. The two forces had met on the morning of the 27th of July, and by early afternoon the

battle had ended with the only crushing defeat to British arms in the whole of the second Afghan War. Some of Burrows's infantry had formed squares and fought desperately to the last; others streamed away towards Kandahar – for the most part a disorganized rabble bereft of all military discipline.

Daubeney, who had commanded the 7th Royal Fusiliers at Deh Kwaja, had been promoted to command the brigade and was now on the way with his men and a regiment of cavalry to visit Maiwand. His instructions were to see how the Afghans had treated the bodies of European and Indian dead, and to take punitive measures if there should be any signs of mutilation or other forms of desecration. Accompanying him were representatives of all regiments and units that had fought in the battle, including Captain Slade of the Royal Horse Artillery, and Captain Beresford-Pierse of the 66th Regiment of Foot.

News of their coming had preceded them, and they had been met at the first camp by a deputation of Afghans who tried to curry favour by handing over some prisoners, five sepoy of the Bombay Grenadiers and a milk-woman. Then, from that point onwards, the brigade had advanced along the road with a cavalry screen probing carefully to either side. Soon they began to find desiccated bodies, more and more, until over a hundred soldiers' corpses had been discovered, all that was left of the poor wretches who had given up and lain down to die, or had been attacked and murdered by the local villagers.

On the morning of the day when they would reach their destination, the advance party rode slowly in extended line over the hard, stony ground south of the Khushk-i-Nakhud Mountains whose spurs rose steeply upwards for two thousand feet on the right of the track, the peaks shining blue-brown in the early morning sunlight. Some leading and flank troopers would have been detailed to keep alert for any signs of hostile tribesmen, though Brigadier-General Daubney did not expect any opposition in strength – but there was no trouble. The Afghans were likely to have been skulking behind the walls of their villages, peering guiltily through loopholes over the deserted fields. They would have seen the cavalry screen pass by, followed by a long column of marching infantry, and remained hidden lest retribution should

be taken for the miserable stragglers whom they had slain so mercilessly only seven weeks before. They need not have worried – there had been a complete amnesty, and strict orders had been issued that no action was to be taken against any Afghan unless he was actually bearing arms in active opposition to the occupation forces.

The brigade group swung half-right to skirt the foothills and headed north-west for Mundabad and Khig, two villages that had played vital roles in the Maiwand battle. The road dipped up and down to cross dry gullies which drained storm-water from the mountain slopes during heavy rains, until it came to the Khushk-i-Nakhud River. There the bed was no longer a bone-dry expanse of light-grey sand and stones, all that was to be found in high summer; now were to be seen pools and occasional trickles of water, legacies from the recent downpour. Daubney's brigade picked a way across and tramped on over the level waste of dirt, stone and spiky tussock until the hovels of Mundabad became visible through their encircling band of walled gardens. Reluctant and anxious village headmen would have been routed out from their prudent self-effacement and made to provide guides who could show where the fallen were lying. Then came a move forward over the steep Mundabad Ravine and on up the gently sloping plain to the scene of the fighting. The cavalry would have posted a chain of vedettes around the whole area as a security precaution, a ring of mounted sentries still on the watch for an enemy – whether in the form of a hostile gang, or as a single ghazi dedicated to martyrdom. Only after that would have begun the melancholy task of finding and identifying the dead.

As things turned out, the actual finding was fairly easy, for the ground was so flat that any excrescence showed up clearly. It was rather more difficult to see the Afghan graves, resting places of warriors whose relatives had lived too far away for them to come and carry their dead sons back to the home villages, as torrential rain had fallen since the burials, smoothing down the earth surface. But the European and Indian bodies had been left lying where they were under burning sun or sheeting rain until a hasty interment had been carried out as a panic measure to avoid punishment. This did not take place until after the storm,

and disturbed soil over the shallow graves was still broken and separated, leaving them clearly discernible. Moreover, it soon became obvious that officers and men had been buried together where they had fallen – not really surprising, the Afghan burial parties, probably forced labour from the nearby villages, would have been unlikely to drag the rotting corpses of unbelievers any further than was absolutely necessary. So, where the fighting had been fierce eighty bodies might be thrown into a single wide hole and covered over with the spoil; where the dead lay scattered over the plain, they were collected and buried in groups of five. Even the Afghan dead were later assembled and bundled two or three to a grave in their own cemetery.

Work began on opening the graves and recording their contents. There was no evidence of mutilation. One officer had been buried with his dog, who had been killed by his side – a pleasantly sentimental gesture from the British point of view, but an act meant to secure damnation by the Mahomedan villager who had done the deed. In all, eighteen of the officers who had been killed were successfully identified. Some were found on the main position where the first phases of the battle had been fought, others among the fields and orchards of Khig where Colonel Galbraith with a hundred and fifty officers and men of the 66th Foot had fought and died – on the line of a great, deep irrigation ditch, or amidst the orchards, or in the last garden before the open plain. It was among these graves that Captain Slade was able to recognize the remains of Major Blackwood, commander of E battery, B Brigade, Royal Horse Artillery, and arranged for a small tomb to be built over the place where he was reburied.

While this sad duty was in progress, Lieutenant Talbot of the Royal Engineers rode around the battlefield making a sketch-map. He would not have had unlimited time, so he probably measured his longer distances by trotting – he would have known how many paces his horse averaged to the mile, and conversion would have been a matter of simple arithmetic. He found the whole plain littered with the abandoned paraphernalia of war. The main British positions were clearly indicated by a mass of discarded rifle and artillery cartridge cases. In another place

behind the main line lay sixty or seventy of the small skull-caps around which the Bombay Grenadiers were used to wind their turbans – though the cloth had long since been looted by the local villagers, who would have found many ways of adapting such valuable material. Strewn over the ground across which the Afghan army and its hordes of savage tribal allies had advanced, been repulsed, and then stormed forward again to screaming victory, were broken daggers and muskets, discarded equipment, sandals, amulets containing texts from the Koran which had failed their owners in the hour of need, all the flotsam and jetsam left by the ebb and flow of the tide of battle. On the far side of a deep, dry storm-course he found and marked on his sketch the final positions of those Afghan guns which had so dominated the last half hour of the action. He dismounted and measured the distances between tracks left by the iron-banded gun-wheels, from which data the types of gun were to be established at a later date. When he had completed this, he returned to note the location and contents of all the graves that had been found – containing altogether over six hundred bodies, a quarter of Brigadier-General Burrows's whole force.

When all was done, those who had been inadequately buried were reinterred with decent ceremony, and the other graves were filled again. Then, after erecting a cairn of stones in memory of the fallen, the brigade group set off on its return journey to Kandahar.

Maiwand caused a sensation at the time. Sherlock Holmes's friend Doctor Watson was said to have been wounded at Maiwand! But the affair was soon forgotten as the public eye centred instead on revolt in the Balkans. Later, during the period between the two World Wars, many schools taught no history that had been made after 1878, so the name meant nothing to schoolboys of that era. However, there is a tale of bravery and endurance that should be told, a story of unselfishness and dedication in defeat, and some wrongs to right. The centenary of the battle seems to be a good time to do this, and to try and explain why so many British and Indian soldiers should be lying to this day in unmarked graves just beneath the surface of a parched plain in South Afghanistan. The reasons

reach far back into the past, but perhaps a suitable starting point should be the middle of the eighteenth century.

2

When the Persian Emperor Nadir Shah was assassinated in 1747, a handsome young officer from among his Afghan subjects seized the throne of Afghanistan and proclaimed his country's independence. His name was Ahmad Khan of the Saddozai family, and he came from Kandahar. When he died a quarter of a century later, he had established an empire of his own, including the Punjab, Kashmir, and Turkestan as far as the Oxus River. The north-eastern Persian province of Khorasan paid him tribute, so did Baluchistan and Sind. He was succeeded by his son Timur, who maintained the realm for twenty years but then died leaving twenty-three sons. Inevitably there ensued a period of anarchy, when prince fought prince, kingmakers rose and fell, and other clans struggled for power. After another quarter-century the Saddozais had lost all Afghanistan except Herat, and the rest of the country was in the hands of the Barakzai family, the most capable of whom – Dost Mahommed – held Kabul. The empire had disintegrated. The Sikhs of the Punjab had not only freed themselves, but had advanced to capture Peshawar and the west bank of the Indus. Sind, Turkestan and Kashmir had all cast off their bondage.

None the less, Afghanistan was now on the map, the name meant something in Europe. The British had ousted the French from India, and had no further fears from that direction, but they knew that Tsarist Russia was beginning to look beyond her borders. Both nations started to probe towards each other through the lands which lay between them, and one of these was Afghanistan.

The first to feel the effect of these machinations was Herat, a city of great strategic, political and commercial importance. All this was owed to its position, as it lay at the junction point of the ancient trade routes leading to Turkestan, Persia, Kabul and India. When the caravans journeyed peacefully through the lands

the city prospered. If the highways bore instead the marching armies of conquest it suffered near catastrophe. Only forty persons survived Jenghis Khan's massacre in the thirteenth century, not many more after the sacking by Timur-i-Leng a hundred and fifty years later. But then came an era of prosperity under the Timurid princes. Fine buildings and mosques were built, and around them reared the walls of a great fortress nearly a mile square. Its perimeter consisted of a deep, broad ditch enclosing a huge earthwork crowned by a high, thick wall. These defences were unsurpassed by any other oriental city, and were impregnable when manned by a strong and determined garrison.

The Russians had realized that it lay on a possible route for invading India, and the British were also well aware of the fact. Persia, on the other hand, was motivated more by regaining the revenue from this rich province. So in 1837, picking a time when the Herati ruler was a weak and dissolute character, a Persian army crossed the frontier and laid siege to the city, assisted by a Russian officer with engineers and artillery.

Fortunately for the Heratis, a young British subaltern of the Bombay Artillery named Pottinger happened to be in their midst. He had made his way there in an entirely unofficial capacity disguised as an Indian holy man, to collect intelligence for the British Government.

When the siege began he declared himself to the Vizier, Yar Mahommed, and soon found himself organizing the defence. An officer with a strong will and plenty of initiative, he made the best of the material available, and was no respecter of persons. For example, there was an occasion when the Persians actually managed to breach the wall and the Herati defenders were beginning to give way. The Vizier, a man of sloth and many vices, was sitting apathetically watching his troops being beaten. Just in time Pottinger arrived on the scene, grabbed Yar Mahommed and threw him bodily into the fray. Startled out of his wits, that dignitary rushed like a madman at his men, belabouring them with a shower of blows from his cane, so terrifying the soldiery that they chose the lesser danger, turned and drove out the enemy. Never again was the garrison so close to disaster, and

after ten months the discomfited Persians raised the siege and departed.

On receiving Pottinger's report, the British Government began to take Russian and Persian incursions into Afghan politics rather more seriously, and made approaches to Dost Mahommed in Kabul, but without being able to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement. So it was decided to re-establish a previous Amir, Shah Shuja, who had long been a refugee in India and would be content to place his foreign policy in British hands. The first Afghan War was declared in 1838, Kandahar and Kabul were captured, Dost Mahommed surrendered after a gallant resistance, and Shah Shuja was enthroned. But it proved impossible to maintain him in power, and the occupying force was withdrawn. Dost Mahommed returned from exile and regained his amirdom. He had been treated well during his internment in India, and became an ally of the British, with whose aid he succeeded where the Persians failed and captured Herat in 1862. Then he died.

The Afghan chieftains reverted to another phase of civil war until after six years Sirdar Shere Ali gained complete control of the three main provinces of Kabul, Kandahar and Herat. Once he found time to think about foreign policy, he decided to renew the alliance with Great Britain, and immediately asked for a substantial subsidy, which was granted to him. In the following year he had a meeting with the Viceroy, Lord Mayo, which was a great success and served to establish mutual confidence. Consequently the British Government began to make plans based on Afghanistan becoming a friendly power rather than a disjointed territory of weak and warring factions. All was sunshine until 1871, when Amir Shere Ali, full of confidence, asked for a British Boundary Commission to arbitrate between Afghan and Persian rival claims to some border country. Unfortunately, the scrupulously honest Englishmen allotted the best and most fertile areas to Persia! This was only a minor annoyance, however, and the Amir did not allow it to rankle. He was far too worried about the slow but inexorable advance of Imperial Russia. Tashkent had been absorbed in 1865, then the Khanate of Bokhara, and Samarkand; the conquest of Khiva was completed in 1873. So Shere Ali decided to invoke not only the spirit of his agree-

ments with Lord Mayo, but also to ask for some more tangible treaty guaranteeing assistance in the event of a Russian invasion. Sad to say, Lord Mayo was no longer there—he had been assassinated during a visit to the Andaman Islands—but his successor Lord Northbrook fully realized the importance of acceding to Shere Ali's requests. He felt so strongly on the matter that he resigned his post when the Duke of Argyll, Secretary of State for India, refused to be committed. Northbrook was quite right, and subsequent events showed that the second Afghan War might have been avoided if his advice had been taken.

Shere Ali chose to regard this refusal to cement the bonds of friendship as a breach of trust. He had relied upon the British. While the Russians had been annexing Bokhara and Khiva he had never believed their Slavic protestations of friendship. Never would they infringe the sovereignty of Afghanistan, they declared with all political sincerity, moving quietly the while into Khokand. Year by year, slowly and methodically their armies drew closer, as the Turcoman drifted despite desperate resistance through chaos to piecemeal tribal subjugation. Any confidence stimulated by official protestations of a friendly neighbour policy was eroded by increasing Russian pursuit of the Great Game—the name given to the Russian and British-Indian pastime of infiltration and intelligence gathering over the whole area between their respective frontiers. The Russians would send in a hard-bitten remittance-man captain with a few Cossacks or mercenary Turkis, probing deeper and deeper along potential lines of strategic advance; coercing, subverting and spying out the land. Too strong to be unobtrusively murdered, too cunning to be caught, hundreds of miles apart these little parties of pseudo-traders tested the climate and surveyed the terrain for ultimate invasion. The British, on the other hand, had been more tactful recently, and were in any case individualists. The odd Moslem horse dealer followed his traditional route through Afghanistan to Turkestan; the lowly Bengali clerk measured his paces by his beads as he followed the big rivers of India into Tibet. A different, humbler, more clandestine and less provocative approach than that of the arrogant Tsarist serving his expanding Motherland.

But now, by all Afghan standards the British had gone back on their word. Shere Ali was distressed and enraged, and began to adjust his concepts to meet the new situation. The Russians constituted the greater threat, the British were the weaker of the two. Tsarist policy was strong and undeviating, the British Government vacillated. He would placate the Russians. It took him time to make up his mind, but eventually emissaries rode away to Tashkent; whence in due course a Russian delegation headed by General Stolyetov emerged to cross the River Oxus, wind its way over the passes and establish itself in Kabul. It was June, 1878.

While all this was going on, Disraeli had replaced Gladstone as Prime Minister. He was greatly disturbed at the increase of Russian influence around the Indian sub-continent, and appointed a new Viceroy, Lord Lytton, with instructions to cultivate the closest relationship with the Amir. But it was too late to start the long process of picking up frayed diplomatic threads. Stolyetov's appearance precipitated matters, and it was decided to insist to Shere Ali that he accept a British delegation in his capital to offset Russian influence. Refusal was to be regarded as a hostile gesture, and the terms would then be imposed by armed force. As nobody expected for one moment that the Amir would acquiesce, preparations for an invasion of Afghanistan were set in train during August.

3

At the beginning of the first Afghan War the British had to ask permission from the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh to pass through his territory – and it had not been granted! Since then, however, two campaigns had been fought against the Sikhs, resulting in annexation of the Punjab to British India. Now any invading army would have a perfect springboard for operations against Central and North Afghanistan. On the other hand, British administration had come face to face for the first time with the wild tribes of the North-West Frontier, the start of a problem which was to last for a century without permanent solution.

Then came the Mutiny, in the course of which a number of lessons about the manning and organization of the Army had been learned the hard way. The early tribulations of 1857 had been due to the European garrison of India being greatly outnumbered by the mutineers, so in the subsequent era of reorganization steps were taken to ensure a considerably higher proportion of European to native troops than had existed previously. Since the sepoy had used their artillery to good effect, they were no longer permitted to handle guns. The new artillery regiments were manned almost entirely by British personnel. At the same time the old Presidency Armies of Bengal, Bombay and Madras were purged of their unreliable elements and resuscitated. Subedar Sita Ram, the faithful old soldier who later told his reminiscences of a lifetime of service, and a few like him were rewarded for their staunch loyalty by being allowed to serve on to a pensionable age. But many old regiments with great traditions were disbanded and replaced by others who recruited only the fine fighting men from the northern mountains and plains, members of martial races which had been defeated or fought to a standstill by the British. These grim, spare Moslems from the Punjab, their bearded Sikh neighbours and the indomitable Gurkhas from Nepal, had all rallied to their conquerors in adversity and slashed their way to victory through the sepoy of Bengal.

The number of native regiments in the Bengal Army was reduced by one-third, and those of Madras by a quarter of their pre-Mutiny totals. The Bombay Army, on the contrary, which had always recruited a significant proportion of its manpower, particularly cavalrymen, from the Central Provinces, had suffered little from disaffection during the troubled years. In consequence, it had been increased slightly in size.

But the three Presidencies still kept what we would call private armies, brooking no interference from outside. Each had the right to recruit, train and maintain its own force, and under normal peacetime conditions there was no interchange of regiments between them. Only in the event of a nation-wide emergency, such as full-scale war, was overall operational command exercised by the Commander-in-Chief, India, who worked under

the Viceroy as an extraordinary member of the Executive Council. Controlling only a small nucleus in peace, in war he had complete charge of all armed forces. Presidency troops were still usually allotted to divisions, or specific Field Forces under officers appointed by their own Army Headquarters, but there had to be some latitude in cases of operational necessity for grouping regiments from different Armies into ad hoc formations for special tasks. In such circumstances there were inevitably wrangles over command appointments; between Presidency Army Headquarters with one another, or combined against insistence by the War Office in London that a good share of the gravy should be given to British Service officers. The Duke of Cambridge did not like the Indian Establishment!

Generals and senior officers of the Presidency Armies, down to and including some of the regimental commanders and older majors, had learned their trade at an early age, battling through the sieges and pursuits of the Indian Mutiny; or in grim confrontation with the stoical Russian masses among the stark hills and steep-banked rivers of the Crimea; others fought in the China wars. The more fortunate had obtained their original commissions as ensigns by the simple process of buying them – a highly undemocratic procedure which in effect caused little trouble in turbulent India where command was never a sinecure, irrespective of the level at which it was exercised. The wealthy but idle young officer soon found that he had to risk as much and work just as hard as his less well-endowed fellow-subalterns. He either thrived on this discovery, or found better use for his talents elsewhere. There was even a certain advantage in the system, in that the enthusiast who enjoyed the life avoided the soul-destroying, frustrating stagnation of boredom while awaiting his proper turn by buying promotion at suitable intervals, thereby eventually reaching a responsible position at an age when he could still exercise all his faculties in the pursuit of his profession. There were, of course, others who won due advancement by sheer ability and exceptional performance in battle, forming the finest officer cadre of all. Some of the remainder, regrettably, reached quite high rank late in life after many years of disappointment, their initiative stifled by disuse. However, by the

beginning of the second Afghan War the purchase system had been abolished for a decade and all officers of merit theoretically had equal opportunities – except against the customary element of patronage which could still on occasions transcend all.

Among the middle-piece officers, some majors and captains had fought in the Umbeyla campaign on the North-West Frontier of India under General Neville Chamberlain; some gained their experience of active service by following Napier through Abyssinia to Magdala; others met their first live enemy during the Lushai operations in Assam.

Few young officers had battle experience. All of them, whether they were destined for the British or Indian Service, had been trained together at Sandhurst or Woolwich. The old East India Company Training College at Addiscombe, which had produced many of the more senior officers serving in Presidency Armies in 1878, had been closed after the Mutiny, when the Company ceased to command a military arm.

All the Indian Service officers were now commissioned into Presidency Staff Corps, so called because regimental duty with native troops was classed as staff employment. Seven British officers were posted to each native infantry and cavalry regiment for command and administration. In this way the Commanding Officer, Second-in-Command and Adjutant were British; then, in the case of the infantry, four more would be shared between the two wings of four companies each – while in the cavalry they would command squadrons. The more direct command of companies and cavalry troops was left in the hands of native officers, some of whom were liable to be past the first flush of youth. This allotment of British officers was quite inadequate for proper war, as opposed to frontier skirmishes. Everyone appreciated the military qualities of the native soldiers, but there was no excuse for assuming that they were so good as to need less leading in battle than British troops, who had twice as many officers to command them. Many experienced officers, including the future Lord Roberts of Kandahar, knew that it could be trying them too highly to send them into a major war with this low establishment.

All three Presidency Armies trained and exercised, but their

most carefully planned and realistic manœuvres lacked that most exigent of umpires, the tribesman with his musket. The Bombay and Madras Armies never saw him. The Bengal Army was very much better off, in that many of its native soldiers were born to the concept of fighting and feuding. It could even be called out occasionally to help the Punjab Irregular Frontier Force when the latter met tribesmen in such numbers or in such difficult country that they could not hope to succeed on their own.

4

Now that another war with Afghanistan seemed more or less certain, the military authorities had to decide the composition of the Field Force. There was no trouble in picking British regiments. So long as they were up to strength, reasonably healthy and not too far from the concentration areas, there was no great difference between them. As regards native regiments, however, there was rather more to think about. Some of them recruited Moslems from tribal territory, or even from Afghanistan itself – and excellent soldiers they had proved themselves to be in campaigns against the Nagas of the North-East Frontier or further afield. But some of them would undoubtedly have to struggle with a conflict of loyalties if called upon to fight their co-religionists or possibly even their own countrymen. Allowances would have to be made for a lack of dedication and, just possibly, desertion, treachery or mutiny. Luckily, there were plenty to choose from – one hundred and forty-three infantry, and forty-two native cavalry regiments. In the end it was decided to use during the initial phases those of predominantly Sikh or Gurkha composition, whose men would not be open to national or religious propaganda. Regiments with strong Pathan complements were none the less to be brought up to strength and moved forward into the base areas, available as reinforcements for later stages of the operation, if required.

Another problem was that of the North-West Frontier, inhabited by swarms of small independent clans, landowners or farmer-bandits, and always a seething cauldron of potential

trouble. Fanatical Moslems all, they scraped a living with their mattocks from a hard and merciless environment, and between times raided indiscriminately among themselves or attacked any badly-guarded village, camp or convoy. In moments of high religious exaltation they might combine together to attack the unbeliever. Mahomedan fervour could produce this temporary cohesion, and so could one other inducement – the prospect of easy victory and plunder. Let a new, inexperienced regiment arrive, or an old regiment grow careless, and a sudden surprise assault might result in its near-annihilation beneath the knives of a horde of yelling tribesmen. News of success, that rifles, loot and glory were to be had, would initiate a chain reaction from tower to village over the whole countryside; until an entire province burst into a conflagration which might not be extinguished without a major operation being mounted. Made aware of this by sad experience, the Government of India decided that it would pay in the long run to leave the first-class, battle-trained Punjab Irregular Frontier Force to carry on with its normal specialized task of keeping the tribes in order, thereby securing unmolested lines of communication, rather than reap the benefit of their unquestioned skill-at-arms in Afghanistan. This meant that Brigadier-General F. S. Roberts, who had assumed command in April, had to take prompt evasive action to avoid missing the war!

Approaches were made also by political officers to the Afridi and Shinwari tribes whose territories lay across the road from Peshawar to Kabul, poor people whose main income was derived from selling right of passage through their lands. They must have had some heart-burnings about negotiating safe conduct to an army marching to invade Afghanistan, but agreement was obtained eventually in return for tolls paid regularly every month. There is no historically accurate description of what actually transpired in the villages, but it is not too difficult to visualize what would have happened – there was little change in tribal procedure for the next fifty years.

‘It was not a jirga, the tribal council of Afridi elders, attendance at which was an exclusive and jealously guarded right. It was a meeting open to every free man; only slaves, women and

children were excluded. And feelings were running high. The watchman on the village tower looking down from above could see the grey-clad human gathering swaying and eddying like a cloud of flies around a sick, restless beggar. Now they would collect in a tight-packed ring of concentrated attention to their spokesmen, now they broke into chaotic groups yelling dissension as the Pathan process of democracy took its course.

'The issue under discussion was not very unusual, nor was the outcome unpredictable – it could only be one of two things. But before a decision could be reached every man must have his say. Proud, free, independent, pock-marked, muscles like steel beneath flea-ridden, sweat-stained grey cloth stinking of body and wood-smoke, the Afridis of the clan listened gravely, or screamed their disagreement. Should the British and their Hindustani soldiers be allowed to pass without hindrance on their way to war against the Amir, or should they be opposed and harassed for every inch of the tortuous tracks through the passes? For tribal honour, and in defence of the faith, there was only one correct path. The mullah mumbled and chattered, mowing over his beads, casting threatening sidelong glances at the maliks – the headmen. The young fellows of no property, with nothing to lose except their lives, shouted support. Here was a chance of booty, rifles, something for nothing, and Paradise for the fallen – what more could a true Pathan require? A roar of approval from the assembly, solemn nods of consent from the maliks. Without doubt this must be what the tribe should do. But just one thing – the British were prepared to offer tribute if they might be allowed to pass. A trifling sum, but the money suggested would be enough for buying more winter fodder and good iron implements for ploughing – perhaps new fields might be brought under cultivation. Dust clouds swirled as straw sandals scuffed the ground of the stony flat, while the young struggled and pushed each other in vehement altercation. The point made, the elders squatted in quiet dignity as slowly the noise abated and silence reigned once more. Perhaps, a malik offered thoughtfully, it might be possible to accept the money, buy the urgently needed goods – even ammunition (a cackle of appreciative laughter!) and then see how the foreigners behaved,

how many there were, and their fighting ability. A little trial of their quality might not go amiss – then, who knows? After all, no treaty with the infidel would be binding on a true believer!

‘So, with general approbation from the tribe, it was agreed to grant passage, with private reservations, to the Army of India.’

5

The operational planners were finding that nobody on the military side had any recent information about the Afghan Army and its capability for war – not really surprising, as there was no Military Intelligence Department.

This was due to India being geared entirely to internal security, which included raids on north-west frontier provinces from tribal territory. These were political matters and were handled by political agencies, supported by the civil police as their executive arm. The officers employed were all experts with long, hard experience of their areas and their peoples, and brooked no encroachment on their preserves or interference by amateurs from outside their own close private circle. In particular, they guarded most jealously the intricate business of gathering intelligence, and organized their own network of spies and informers. Naturally, they were concerned only with matters directly affecting the situation in their own, and possibly adjacent, areas; so any information from beyond their boundaries was purely incidental, and usually unconfirmed. The Police Department was the intelligence processing authority and issued bulletins quite adequate for its own requirements and for those of the Central Indian Government.

So after searching fruitlessly for planning material through forty-year-old files on the first Afghan War, the General Staff had to set aside its pride and make an official request to the Foreign Department for assistance. Then at last a Police Report giving an Afghan Order of Battle was made available.

Among other assessments, the Report stated that the Afghan Army was badly led and only partly trained – except for the

Artillery, which was officered mostly by Kizilbash, descendants of Persian settlers, known for their better discipline and comparative honesty. This turned out to be a reasonably fair appreciation. But it also claimed that the soldiers would promptly change sides if attacked by the British, which was quite wrong – such a thing never happened throughout the whole war. What the report did not consider, and which was to prove a very dangerous omission indeed, was the tremendous latent fighting potential of the Afghan country tribes and peasants.

The Afghan was a natural combination of warrior and bandit, callous towards death and suffering, brave in battle. His valour was tempered by a realistic sense of caution; he felt no urge to throw away his life by taking risks without a prospect of gain commensurate with the danger involved. But if he came to bear a grudge, or his pride was invoked, or he could be persuaded that he was fighting a holy war; then, after a time of argument and encouragement, he could be induced to throw care to the winds and subordinate his better judgement to his hereditary hatred of infidels, strangers and foreigners. He would flock to the standard of a popular leader, and speedily desert a failing cause. Immune in his natural state to discipline, but almost irresistible when finally roused, given sufficient numbers he was a formidable foe. Every villager carried weapons and knew how to use them. His firearm varied from the old tribal jezail, an antique musket, to a rifle equal in performance for penetration and accuracy to the Snider issued to the native soldiers of the Indian Presidency Armies. He was seldom, however, a marksman, as there was never enough ammunition to spare for practice; he would fire the bare minimum to acquire sufficient skill to play his part in inter-tribal squabbles or blood-feuds, or to protect his livestock against depredations by leopards or packs of wolves; after that he would rely on getting the rest of his training in action. Men such as these could cover sixty miles on foot in twenty-four hours when they had the need, which enabled large forces to assemble for battle at the shortest notice, with no warning at all – a military asset equalled only by their ability in adversity to disperse and vanish beyond pursuit among their hills and deserts.

Social life was subject to a certain amount of stress. In a country where a dozen boys were born for every girl, a male death-by-violence figure even greater than that of mediaeval England still left numbers of sex-hungry and sex-denied young prowlers around every village. To them the sanctity of the marriage bed meant less than nothing. If the opportunity existed, it was taken, and the lady almost always agreed to an interlude in her routine marital relationship – with enthusiasm! If the opportunity did not exist, it had to be manufactured. If caught, the culprits expected to pay the penalty. Once a certain small-holder left his home and his wife to lead a raiding party, whereupon opportunity arose several times for a young bachelor living nearby. The lady, with joyous cooperation – to quote the original wording – ‘opened the flood-gates of her love to him’. She was still busy doing so when her husband returned unexpectedly from his foray, and he skewered the lovers down through the bed to the ground with one strong thrust of his spear. So they died – eventually – watched by an awe-struck gathering of neighbours and their wide-eyed children.

Cruelty was endemic. Little boys found a wounded Hindu trooper crawling through the fields towards their village for help, so they poked his eyes out with his own lance. Woe betide any foe who fell into the hands of Afghans. If he was dead, they mutilated his corpse; if alive, they were full of ingenious ways to test his courage and satisfy their own inherent sadism. This was generally known, so nobody ever surrendered to an Afghan tribesman.

On enlistment into the regular forces he became what can best be described as a tribesman in fetters. He could no longer make use of his natural skill in fire and movement, nor follow his own instincts. He was expected to advance to the attack simply on receipt of an order, without time for discussion or for the screamed encouragement of his holy men. A considerable amount of time had to elapse before his obedience became prompt, without question or resentment – if it ever did! But with proper training he could reach a high military standard, and would obey good officers with skill and devotion. He was capable of campaigning under conditions of great hardship, and the Presi-

dency Armies considered the few Afghans who enlisted to be good and loyal soldiers under British discipline.

The backbone of any Afghan tribal army or gang was the ghazi, a man devoting his life to the extinction of all creeds other than the Moslem faith, vowing to exterminate all infidels with the sword. By doing so, he earned the certainty of going to Paradise.

Brigadier-General Brooke, whom we meet later, describes them as follows: 'So concerned are they that if they can only kill an infidel their future happiness is secured, that they are perfectly indifferent as to whether they lose their life in the attempt or not, in fact I believe they rather desire to be killed and so enter at once on all the delights of a Mahomedan Paradise, the principal charm of which is, that they are there to have as many wives as ever they like, all, we will hope, warranted free from vice and temper, and requiring no management, but living as a happy family, without any jealousy or inclination to scratch out each other's eyes, as I fear would be the case in a similar establishment on Earth!'

Nothing but death would stop their charge, and military doctrine of the time laid down that they should never be allowed to get close. It was essential that their formation should be disrupted by rapid and heavy volleys of concentrated fire from the moment that they looked like massing for an attack. They could always be recognized by their white robes, symbol of purity and dedication. Their presence could make or mar an action, in that they provided leadership to the ordinary clansman. Even women were admitted as ghazis and allowed to remove their veils, following their men into action to tend the wounded.

There were relatively few ghazis in North Afghanistan, but the country around Kandahar was peopled by the Duranis, who claimed descent from the lost tribes of Israel carried away into captivity in biblical times by the Persians. Historically recent converts to Islam, many were more fanatical than the fanatics, and every other one was a potential ghazi. The Zamindawar Hills to the north-west of Kandahar contained the most zealous and quarrelsome ghazis and tribesmen in the whole of the South.

CHAPTER 2

The Invasion of Afghanistan

1

AFTER A REASONABLE amount of time had passed, and Amir Shere Ali still had not vouchsafed a reply to the British demand for representation in Kabul, the proposed Mission set forth from Peshawar headed by General Sir Neville Chamberlain. It reached the frontier on 21 September, 1878, and Major Cavagnari, the District Commissioner of Kohat, rode forward and officially demanded entry from General Faiz Mahomed Khan, an old acquaintance who was in charge of the Afghan forces holding the Khyber Pass. He was equally formally refused passage into Afghan territory, and was told by the general when he protested that he would have been shot down in accordance with the Amir's orders if it had not been for their personal friendship. There was nothing for him to do but to turn around and make his way back to report failure.

On hearing the news the Viceroy immediately despatched to Shere Ali an ultimatum due to expire on 20 November. Financial authority, previously withheld, was then granted for all regiments north of the Narbada River – which meant all the Bengal Army and most of the Bombay Army – to recruit additional men to bring themselves up to war establishment. Each cavalry regiment was to enrol ninety-six sowars (troopers) and each infantry regiment two hundred sepoy. This was better than nothing, but was not a satisfactory system – these men would not be reservists, who would only require a short period of training to bring them back to their original efficiency, but recruits 'straight from the tree' who would have to be trained up from the very basic principles. In some cases even left and right might be a complete mystery and too far advanced; so hay

would be tied to one foot and straw to the other. Then men would be taught to move around the parade-ground to the shouts of 'Hay! Straw!' in their mother tongue – if the instructors happened to know it; sometimes they did not. So regiments had either to take their recruits along with them and train them on the way, or leave them at the depot. In the latter event, officers and NCOs would have to be left with them, and the men would not be available in an emergency. But they would at least be properly trained, while instruction on the march was always a haphazard affair, with all fatigues falling upon the juniors. The choice lay with regiments.

It was also decided to bring the garrison of Quetta up to divisional strength by despatching a force under Major-General Biddulph to Baluchistan from Sind and the Derajat, and to follow it up with another complete division. The South Afghanistan Field Force, as this corps was to be called, would be commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir Donald Stewart.

After the disruption of Timur's empire, Baluchistan had experienced a similar history of anarchy and civil war, laying the country wide open to foreign intrigues and aggression. Khudadad Khan, the Khan of Kalat, was at perpetual strife with his sirdars, the local chiefs. So the Government of India watched carefully, biding its time until 1876, when it seemed that all Baluchi parties had wearied of their internal struggles. Then Major Sandeman with a small infantry escort was sent to arrange a reconciliation between the warring factions. An agency was set up in Quetta, and excellent relations were established, resulting in this very important part of the frontier being converted quite soon from a scene of wild disorder into a fairly peaceful area. This was a real God-send to the South Afghanistan Field Force, providing them with a base without which there would have been very much more hardship and loss of life during the forthcoming operations.

Biddulph's Quetta Column was to be composed of the troops concentrated around Jacobabad and Multan, consisting of three cavalry and seven infantry regiments, with three batteries of artillery – in all six thousand four hundred men and sixteen guns. The effects of the monsoon were still being felt, and there was

KANDAHAR
AFGHANISTAN
Dubbral



extensive flooding of the River Indus, sufficient to hold up the Jacobabad contingent, but the Multan element of the Force was ready to go.

The 70th Regiment of Foot moved out from Multan Cantonment on 23 September bound for the village of Dera Ghazi Khan on the west bank of the Indus, a journey of forty-six miles. This involved several marches over tracts of desert and arid plain, carrying with them the lowest scale of camp equipment and baggage consistent with the rather Spartan standards of health and comfort prevailing at the time. They crossed the Chenab River in flat-bottomed craft and little steamboats, and marched on to the Indus, exposed to a sun that had not yet lost all its violent summer heat.

There would have been very little difference between the Indus that met their eyes and the scene presented to another group of British soldiers at the same river fifty years later. Then, the waters eddied and gurgled among the rickety piles below the ferry station and slid rippling along the sides of the boats. Close to the banks the blunt green snouts of turtles stubbed upwards through the surface, gasping air through distended nostrils, bodies invisible through the opaque brown stream. This was no longer the raging, deep chocolate torrent of monsoon rain, though the flood still stretched in a broad sheet of majestic flow as far as the eye could see, in a panorama broken only by occasional splashes of brown or green from sandbanks or scrub-decked islets. Now the crossing had to be made by boat. Later, the unfed river, its power dissipated into a thousand irrigation channels would lose its strength and lie unresisting in a twisted skein of silver weaving quietly over shallow beds, the broader reaches spanned by pontoons and makeshift dry-weather bridges. Then would come long jangling strings of camels, caravans on the move, convoys of carts drawn by sluggish oxen, men and women on foot carrying the yield of their meagre husbandry to market.

The more adventurous villagers were already on the move. As the troops waited to embark, a soldier with sharp eyes drew the attention of his friends to a dark mote in the middle distance. They watched it grow slowly larger as it moved imperceptibly

nearer. At last it became a man with a heavy bundle on his shoulders, leaning against the current and wading towards the shore. Before him, he pushed an inflated goat skin which had buoyed him over the deeps where his feet had been unable to find purchase on the river bed. Weary, soaked and bedraggled he squelched his path through the shallows, sparing only a disinterested glance for the white soldiers looking at him and chaffing.

It was a holiday atmosphere as the companies embarked and began their voyage to Dera Ghazi Khan. The men were at ease, conversing sleepily or playing cards, sitting on the deck in the hot, white sunlight. Sometimes they were comforted by a waft of moist, cool air across the water, or were shaded by one of the great, white cloud cumuli sailing slowly westward overhead.

After staging at Dera Ghazi Khan, the regiment marched down the west bank to Mithankot where they camped in the shade of green trees lining the avenues of the cantonment, a refreshing contrast to the surrounding desert. They made the most of this brief period of repose, for it was to be the last time that they were to enjoy the luxury of shade for several months. Soon they set off on their way again, accompanied this time by E-4 RA, a battery of field artillery.

2

In the evening of 24 October British soldiers of the 70th Regiment of Foot and E-4 Field Battery stood around the edge of the Bandowali maidan, a piece of flat ground used for parades, waiting to fall in and move on to Kabrudani. They had sweated through the roasting heat of the day in their tents, which had been struck some time earlier and loaded on to camels for the march. They were hot, dehydrated and listless. There had not been enough water at Bandowali, only one well which had to suffice for men and animals, the first time that there had been restrictions since leaving Multan a month earlier. Although, let it be said, Multan itself had been no holiday camp! One of the hottest places in India, and surrounded by nothing, in later years

it was to become the station to which a regiment could be posted as a form of punishment. During the hot weather the men had spent most of the hours of daylight confined to their barrack-rooms for protection against the blazing furnace out of doors – but there had been plenty of water available in cool, porous earthenware pots, the ubiquitous chattis. Since then they had covered over a hundred miles, and had to some extent settled into the routine of making and breaking camp.

The march from Mithankot had been easy as far as Lalgoshi, but the last ten miles to Bandowali had been through loose sand. Even though the column had travelled in the comparative cool of night, the last stage had been a strain on the bullocks pulling the wagons and the horses drawing the guns. Now word had been passed around that a worse sector lay ahead, twenty-three miles mostly over sand, and no water obtainable on the way. Morose and silent, the men waited for the orders to move off.

A hundred men were already unfit to march, and camels to carry them had been requisitioned from a supply convoy. Some of these sufferers had already been loaded into their kajawas, hybrid frameworks, part pannier, part stretcher, lashed one on each side of a camel's hump. Others who were in better condition waited beside their kneeling beasts to mount and ride sitting upright.

General Biddulph and his staff rode up, accompanied by Mr Fryer, the Deputy Commissioner of the District, and Imam Buksh, a Baluchi chief who had agreed to escort the column over his land. The men fell in, officers reported ready, and at eight o'clock in the evening the party set out across the desert. First in the order of march was the field battery escorted by two hundred picked men of the 70th Foot; then the infantry main body; and the transport, guarded on the flanks and in the rear by more infantrymen and some of Imam Buksh's tribal horsemen.

It became a dark night, with no moon to help the starlight. A few lanterns had been provided, but only enough to act as beacons for keeping the various portions of the column in touch, and to show the direction taken by the leaders. Within a mile the beaten, higher ground near the post had changed into a sur-

face of shifting sand interspersed with hummocks, and the wheeled vehicles began bumping and sliding behind their floundering teams. The first to become thoroughly bogged down axle-deep in sand was the artillery forge-wagon with its heavy load of spare shoes and metal. The whole convoy stopped while it was extricated and put on the way again. But this was only the beginning, and for the next two hours there were constant stoppages, the bullock-teams especially having great difficulty in keeping their wagons on the move. At ten o'clock Biddulph decided that there was absolutely no point in keeping the whole 70th Foot waiting around for the battery, and sent the main body tramping thankfully off into the darkness. The General stayed behind with the guns and their escort.

The sand became softer and deeper, and by midnight the forced halts were beyond counting. The horse-teams pulling the guns and ammunition wagons, when not having trouble themselves, were constantly being unhooked and sent back to drag forward stranded vehicles. One way was to get up speed and gallop, when the cart or wagon would come bouncing along, carried over soft patches by sheer momentum, but the unfortunate teams could not keep that up for very long. They reached a broad, dry valley with a smooth surface and hoped for an easier time, but iron-shod wheels soon broke through the thin upper crust and ploughed their way into the loose sand beneath. After seven hours, by three o'clock in the morning, the battery had covered only seven miles. There were still sixteen miles to go, and advancing hard on their heels was the threat of day and its scorching sun.

The General's choice lay between the whole of the column spending the day in the open desert, or leaving the lame ducks to be picked up later. So the four worst wagons were dumped, guarded by a few infantry, gunners and Baluchis, with a small ration of water. The teams of the abandoned vehicles were put to help draw others, but when yellow day rose glaring over the eastern dunes only two miles had been achieved. There was now only one answer, and that was to stop applying half-measures. All vehicles except the guns were left in a leaguer with some guards, and twelve horses were harnessed to pull each of the six

guns. In this way the last fourteen miles to Kabrudani were covered without any further mishap. Every camel, horse and bullock came on with the gun group – there was no point in their staying behind, there was not enough water to leave with them. On arrival, water and food were sent back; and after resting overnight the gun teams returned and fetched in the wagons left in the desert.

All was well, and valuable experience had been gained. But it was fortunate that Imam Buksh was a man of his word, and much credit was due to Sandeman and Fryer for their sound judgement of character. The column had been very vulnerable indeed, strung out in small groups over the sandy waste, but no part of it had been molested. If there had been a desert-wise aggressive enemy to contend with as well as a hostile climate and terrain, Biddulph might have suffered severe casualties.

Harking back to the beginning of the march, a hundred men of the 70th Foot had to be carried from Bandowali – but there was nothing unusual about this number. General Biddulph in his account only mentions it in passing. Another British regiment was about to join the Kurram Field Force, described by the future Lord Roberts as sickly to a degree, with a long line of doolies (covered litters) and ambulance carts. In this case even the transport animals were in every stage of malnutrition and disease!

The Army in India suffered from dysentery, cholera and malaria. During the hot weather, officers and men alike collapsed from heat exhaustion; in the winter, regiments could be decimated by pneumonia. In 1865 an average of ten men in every infantry company died, even under the prevailing peacetime conditions; on active service it was not unusual for a man to be lost through sickness for every one killed by the enemy. Medical science was still in some respects in its infancy. Dysentery was not yet attributed to a bacillus or amoeba, but to exposure to cold after heat, eating unripe fruit or raw vegetables, intemperance in eating and drinking, hot climate and unhygienic surroundings. Cholera was not unknown in Europe – over fourteen thousand died from it in England and Wales alone in 1866 but it was still put down to cold and damp alternating with heat

and excessive drinking of cold liquids after perspiration. Instructions were issued that it could sometimes be cured by winding a puttee around one's stomach. Half a century later embarrassed troop-deck officers were even then expected to sell that one to suspicious soldiers' wives! Koch's first tentative identification of a micro-organism did not occur until 1883, and his hypothesis was treated with scepticism for years. Malaria was caused by the noxious vapours from swamps; their swarms of mosquitoes were merely a local inconvenience. However, a French army surgeon was to discover living parasites in the blood of a malarial patient before the second Afghan War was over. Sunstroke was due to the direct rays of the sun on the nape of the neck, though overheating in any way was a contributory factor. Salt deficiency was not suspected; only in World War II was salt mixed with the water ration before issue, as a matter of routine.

Within the limitations of medical knowledge, all possible steps were taken to combat these scourges. In preparation for the northerly advance of the South Afghanistan Field Force, Major Sandeman had been told, 'There is no point which will demand more attention than the protection of soldiers, followers and animals from the vicissitudes of the climate.' So when Biddulph's column arrived in Quetta after crossing over the six thousand feet high Bolan Pass, with its piercingly cold autumn winds, enough to strain the strongest constitution, they found awaiting them plenty of supplies, wood for cooking, bedding and warm sheepskin coats for all ranks. There was sufficient for themselves and for the remainder of the Force which was moving up hard behind them.

3

No reply to the British ultimatum was received, so on 21 November, 1878, two columns crossed the Afghan frontier. Two divisions under Lieutenant-General Sir Sam Browne (designer of the famous belt) moved up through the Khyber Pass and occupied Jalalabad, while another commanded by Major-General F. S.

Roberts advanced on a parallel thrust further to the south through the Kurram Valley.

The South Afghanistan Field Force of two divisions under Lieutenant-General Sir Donald Stewart received orders to advance and occupy Kandahar. After that, a part of the Force was to carry on westwards as far as Girishk and the Helmand River, and another portion was to reconnoitre north-east to Khelat-i-Ghilzai – but no further in either case. Sandeman had anticipated this order also, and had collected hordes of ill-clothed and undisciplined camel-drivers and their beasts to act as transport over the Khojak Pass into Kandahar Province.

General Stewart was anxious to get over the pass before the winter snow fell, so when Brigadier-General Nuttall and his 2nd Infantry Brigade arrived on 8 December, probably looking forward to a decent rest, they were speedily despatched onwards as advance guard. Lieutenant-Colonel Mainwaring and the 30th Bombay Native Infantry (Jacob's Rifles) were left behind in Quetta as garrison, with two guns and a squadron of cavalry.

It was well known that tracks over the top of the Khojak were impassable for wheeled transport and loaded camels, and that a lot of road-making would be necessary. The pass was very narrow and difficult, offering many opportunities for ambushes, so an infantry regiment was deployed on both sides of the defile, occupying the high ground and watching over every gully and concealed approach to secure the pioneers from surprise attack. Then work began, and soon the crest of the Khojak presented a most animated scene. Every path zig-zagging up from the lower slopes was thronged with troops, horses, mules and camels progressing steadily onwards as the way was made clear. Through determination and sheer hard work, helped by the fine weather, the cavalry, infantry, mule-borne mountain artillery and four hundred and fifty of the baggage camels had crossed by 14 December. Then came the turn of the field artillery, the only wheels accompanying the Force. They had managed to reach the top without too much trouble but the first part of the descent was too rough and steep for a gun-team. So a ramp was constructed over the worst of the downward slope,

and an officer was stationed at both top and bottom to make sure that everything was kept under control. Then each individual limber, body and gun was let down slowly by ropes held by a working party at the top, and was accompanied by two men to keep the load steady. At the same time, the horses which had been unharnessed were led around by a narrow track to the foot of the ramp where they were reharnessed to their limbers and the guns were hooked-in. In this way each battery took a day and a half to reach the bottom of the Khojak, but every gun arrived in operational condition.

The Force was now poised on the Afghan border, living hard. But special efforts were made to celebrate Christmas Day. Wood for cooking and bonfires had been collected, no easy task in that desolation, and extra rations were issued, so every officer and soldier enjoyed a good plain dinner and the warmth and light of a campfire.

At long last concentration of men, guns and supplies was completed, orders were given to advance, and on 3 January, 1879, Brigadier-General Nuttall led the invasion of South Afghanistan. But there was virtually no resistance. A few Afghan horsemen were killed in a cavalry skirmish on the second day; then the remainder melted away. The Kandahar garrison dispersed without a fight.

4

Kandahar had changed hands many times during the course of its history. It consisted of a walled city with a central keep, all built from mud-brick and surrounded by a ten-foot-deep ditch. Inside were shops and dwellings, walled gardens with their own wells, and a bazaar. Great skill and energy had been expended in digging canals and water-courses to the Arghandab River at a point many miles distant, resulting in an ample water supply for the city. According to a contemporary report, 'The chief canal with its offshoots conducts a vast body of water which is dispersed along the contours of the declining plain in innumerable water-channels, spreading a rich fertility for many miles.

Cornfields, orchards, gardens and vineyards are seen in luxurious succession, presenting a veritable oasis with a girdle of rugged hills and desert wastes all around.' With a height of three thousand four hundred feet the climate was almost ideal.

The South Afghanistan Field Force made its ceremonial entry into Kandahar on 8 January. The troops were welcomed warmly by Hindus and traders, and those inhabitants who were of Persian origin showed marked signs of satisfaction. But for the most part the populace watched yet another foreign army march in through their gates without any expression of feeling, and carried on their lives as they had done for centuries. Yet within two days the trouble began, the first incident concerning Major St John, the Political Officer with the Force. He was riding through the streets with the Afghan Civil Governor when a man leaped forward and discharged a pistol in his face. Fortunately the major's horse was startled by the sudden movement and shied away, causing the shot to miss. The assailant then drew his sword, but was cut down and made prisoner by St John's cavalry orderly. Under interrogation it was found that the would-be assassin was a deserter from the Khan of Kalat's army with a bitter grudge against Major Sandeman, for whom he had mistaken St John. At just the same time Lieutenant Willis of the Royal Artillery was fatally stabbed by a fanatic in another part of the city. There was little consolation in the fact that his attacker was killed.

Lieutenant-General Sir Donald Stewart decided to waste no time in completing the second phase of his directive. Biddulph was detailed for the reconnaissance in force of the Helmand River line, while he himself would sally north-east along the Kabul road to Khelat-i-Ghilzai. Nuttall was to remain behind in charge of the Kandahar garrison.

Biddulph's orders were to feed his division, to find and tap new sources of supply, and to examine the country in general; then to await further instructions. It was as well that there was no great urgency as the transport situation was very strained; the approach road between Chaman and Kandahar was already strewn with the corpses of nearly twelve thousand of Sandeman's wretched baggage-camels, and it was still difficult to hire replace-

ments locally. The two columns set out for their respective destinations on 16 January, and Biddulph soon found that the suburbs of Kandahar had not been designed for wheeled traffic. The streets were too narrow, as were the bridges, which were also too weak to support the weight of field artillery. But the sappers and pioneers had already made most of the necessary improvisations, strengthening here, constructing a detour there, mending the ancient caravan road up to the Arghandab River (to be accurate, as Ab means River – up to the Arghand). There they built ramps down to the ford and up the other side, and cleared a way through the cultivated land bordering the far bank. Thereafter lay one vast, flat desert skirting the northern mountains, and no further road-making was needed.

By the 23rd Biddulph was at Karez-i-Ata and from there he tried the southern route along the Arghandab towards Kalabist, but found the country so barren and devoid of supplies that he retraced his steps, and then marched due west for Girishk. He reached the Helmand River on the 29th of the month and found that the east bank rose up a hundred and seventy-five feet above the water, giving good observation over the river and the alluvial tract beyond it which ran right to the walls of the fort a mile or so beyond. The Helmand varied in width between ninety and a hundred yards but was only four feet deep at the ford, which meant that the cavalry, artillery and unladen camels had no difficulty in crossing. The original ferry appeared to be missing, but was soon discovered sunk in the river and was easily brought back into working order. Hawsers attached to it were stretched from bank to bank, and it was then used for carrying across infantry dry-shod, and supplies. The fort at Girishk had been abandoned and proved to be rather dilapidated, but was occupied and used as a hospital for the sick.

The column stayed for two weeks, waiting for the survey teams covering the whole area from the Arghandab to catch up. During this time a reconnaissance in force to Kalabist was carried out, as a result of which it was found that there was no defensive position in the area as strong as the high ground east of the Girishk ford. A deeper and more intricate ford had been tried two miles further north, but there was nothing to be gained by

moving there – only the most modest precautions were adjudged necessary to render the Girishk position unassailable.

By the middle of February, however, the surrounding country had been almost entirely denuded of supplies by Biddulph's foragers, and he would in any case have had to shift camp; but it so happened that plans were already afoot to reduce the strength of the South Afghanistan Field Force, and he received orders to return to Kandahar. Biddulph decided that the journey would be carried out with full operational precautions, for although the march out and the stay at Girishk had aroused no reactions from the Afghans, he had no intention of relaxing. He knew that he had been in the area long enough for news of his presence to be noised abroad, and there were reports that some of the Zamindawar tribesmen and local rascals might be planning a hostile move. So when the main body marched for Kandahar on 23 February he sent a small force up the east bank of the river to watch the fords around Haidarabad. This party was to remain there for the night, then cut across to Yak-Chal, stage there for the following night, and afterwards continue back towards Kandahar as rearguard to the division, one march behind. Probably by design, this rearguard was made up from parts of the only two regiments of the Bombay Army to have reached Kandahar. Lieutenant-Colonel Malcolmson was put in command with two hundred and sixty-six sabres from his own regiment, the 3rd Sind Horse, supported by Lieutenant-Colonel Tanner and one hundred and eighteen bayonets of the 29th Bombay Native Infantry (2nd Baluchis).

There was nothing to be seen at Haidarabad so the rearguard staged back as planned until early afternoon on the 26th, when they made camp by a village complex west of the Khushk-i-Nakhud River. Normal routine was set in motion. The regimental grass-cutters were sent out to collect forage for the horses, and Malcolmson – a good horsemaster – ordered a saddlery inspection. He does not appear to have been quite so operationally-minded as his general, or else he had been lulled into a very false sense of security, for he made his squadrons take all their harness to pieces, clean it, and lay it out on blankets for checking. In extenuation, it must be remembered that a badly packed

saddle lining meant a sore back, and a sore back meant a horse out of action until it had healed. One recalls a young officer who was told that if one more of his mules became unable to carry a load, his own bedding would have to be left behind!

Suddenly, at twenty past four there arose a terrible hullabaloo, and over the crests of the nearby small hillocks came the grass-cutters and their animals at best speed, ponderously galloping camels, careering ponies, driven or dragged in full flight back towards the safety of the camp, with fearful cries that the enemy was upon them. Malcolmson had excused some sowars from his inspection to act as vedettes – mounted outposts around the camp – and moments later they confirmed that a tribal army with banners flying was coming down the track from Maiwand and was already only a mile and a half away.

While the Sind Horse got their harness together again at all-time record speed, Malcolmson ordered the Baluchis, who had not seemingly been taken at such a disadvantage, to move out at once and engage the enemy as far forward as possible. Then, when the squadrons were ready Tanner was to give ground slowly with the hope of drawing the Afghans after his infantrymen to some more open country close to camp, where the cavalry should be able to deal with them very effectively. At the same time Malcolmson despatched an orderly to ride hell for leather to the main body at the next stage with news that he was being attacked and asking urgently for reinforcements. It must be presumed that he had made a quick reconnaissance and estimated that he was greatly outnumbered.

The plan began to work well. Tanner's men held the Afghan forward elements, then gradually fell back pursued by tribesmen howling exultantly at seeing the Baluchis in retreat. Slowly, and in an orderly manner, the infantry withdrew into the flat area that Malcolmson had chosen as a killing ground. There, two squadrons under Major Reynolds were drawn up ready and waiting, with drawn sabres. Malcolmson gave the order, and the charge was launched. The squadrons set off at a walk, broke into a trot, then a canter – and finally struck the enemy centre with all their weight at full gallop, shattering the Afghan formation, riding down their horsemen, destroying all semblance of

order and discipline. For ten minutes there was fierce hand-to-hand fighting, and then the tribesmen began to scatter. As they did so, the Sind Horse split into troops and concentrated their efforts on any remaining cohesive groups of opponents as the Afghans backed away, disputing the ground fiercely as they went. It was a most exhilarating action, marred only by the loss of Major Reynolds. He had been hard-hit early on by a musket-ball but refused to obey his colonel's order to hand over command. Wounded as he was, he continued to lead his men through the *mêlée* until his horse stumbled and fell at a dry water-course. He was thrown at the very feet of some enemy swordsmen, who hacked him to pieces before he could rise to his feet.

The battle was far from over, however. The enemy were in such numbers that their right wing was completely unaffected by the cavalry charge, and now advanced to outflank the British left, aiming for a nearby village. Seeing this, Malcolmson with the rest of his regiment moved to intercept them, but found the way blocked by a wide and deep irrigation-channel, while the Afghans gained protection among the houses. He then began to organize an infantry attack on the village, and only countermanded it when he heard that his camp was being attacked from the other side – a report which turned out later to have been a false alarm. Then, as it was getting dark, he recalled his main force from their pursuit of the fleeing enemy and moved into a mud fort which was close to his original camp for the night. By morning the tribesmen had melted away. It turned out that they were mostly Alizais from the Zamindawar Hills, fifteen hundred of them, including fifty horsemen – and five hundred *ghazis*, who, if this was true, had by no means measured up to their reputation for suicidal bravery. A hundred and fifty enemy lay dead on the field of battle, one of them a notorious local bandit chief. Bombay Army losses were one officer and four sowars killed, Malcolmson and twenty-three others wounded, and twenty-eight horses lost.

Some reinforcements from the main body arrived at about midnight; and before the march to Kandahar was resumed next day, General Biddulph rode in, insufficiently perturbed at Malcolmson's cry for help to have brought more than a small escort

with him, to travel with his rearguard for the rest of the way.

Malcolmson was promoted to colonel and awarded the CB for his part in the affair at Khushk-i-Nakhud. We meet him again under different circumstances when he and his regiment were to be criticized for their conduct. It should not then be forgotten that in this, their first action, the Sind Horse charged without hesitation and with devastating effect through an enemy outnumbering them by six to one; and, what is more, after a full day's march.

5

In the north, Sam Browne was still at Jalalabad, and Roberts had moved up the Kurram Valley to take the Peiwar Kotal, a high pass at its head, by a surprise attack at night. Some earlier misgivings turned out to have been justified completely, as the latter operation was jeopardized by some Pathans of a native infantry regiment who tried to warn their Moslem opponents of the advance by letting off their rifles. The disaffection was so deep-seated that even a jemadar, a junior native officer, tried to shield the culprits; and eighteen Moslem sepoy's deserted during the same night. It turned out that only two soldiers had actually fired shots. One was court-martialled and executed, the other was reprieved because he was very young, and sentenced instead to a long term of transportation to the Andaman Islands penal settlement, together with the jemadar and the deserters, who had been apprehended.

Apart from these early battles there had been little action in North Afghanistan, but there were inevitably some disturbances along the lines of communication which ran through wild and rugged country. The payment of monthly subsidies could never completely guarantee safe movement in tribal territory, and the maliks could not always control their unruly elements. So survey parties, for example, had to be given strong escorts wherever they went to work. This trade may not appear to be a very glamorous occupation nowadays, but a hundred years ago it

attracted some of the best young officers of the Royal Engineers – Lieutenant Herbert Kitchener was about to embark on a survey of Cyprus. Captain Leach commanded a detachment working over a new sector in Shinwari land east of Jalalabad, and although he never reached the same heights as Kitchener, he became a general. He was to play a significant part in the South Afghanistan battles, so it is proposed to describe his first skirmish in some detail – to introduce him, and to show his mettle.

The detachment was escorted by Lieutenant Barclay with forty bayonets from the 45th Sikh Infantry and forty sabres of the Guides Cavalry. One morning in March, 1879, Leach broke camp and set off with his escort to climb a mountain towering two thousand feet above the plain, in order to do some survey of the surrounding country from its summit. He took with him also a local malik in case of difficulties with the villagers in the area. The mounted troopers trotted out to form a thin protective screen in front and to the flanks, while the party of infantry and surveyors made their way to the foothills and up the lower slopes. Half a mile from the top Leach decided that there was no useful purpose to be served by taking the horses any further as the hill was becoming too steep and rocky for any effective cavalry action. He ordered the sowars to dismount and form a base through which the infantry could withdraw if they got into trouble. Their horses he directed to be led away and held under cover further down the hill. Then the rest of the group moved off again, climbing steadily upwards with slow, measured strides, breathing deeply as they got the rhythm and their lungs grew accustomed to the extra effort of the ascent.

On reaching the top they had an excellent view all around in the clear light of a mountain morning. But they, too, had been observed. As soon as they appeared over the crest drums beat among the villages below them at the foot, warning shots were fired into the air, while numbers of armed Shinwaris came swarming out of the hovels and began to thread their way through the rocks and scrub up towards the detachment. The reluctant malik was sent down to reason with the leaders, to remind them of the promise to allow free movement over their territory, but was

laughed to scorn by the now thoroughly aroused and blood-thirsty tribesmen. On they came with the lithe, effortless lope of the hillman, dropping into cover behind rocks as they got closer, to snipe at the heads of their enemy.

Leach held his position as long as he could, but there were too many Shinwaris, so there was no choice but to go. He may have waited a little too long to make quite sure that the villagers were really determined, thereby letting them come too close. As a result Barclay, easily distinguished at short range as a British officer and prize target, was hit in the shoulder by a jezail-ball and so severely wounded that he was unable to keep on his feet, and had to be carried down the rear slope by four of his men. This slowed down the descent of the whole party. Leach sent the Sikh native officer and half his men with Barclay, and retained the remaining twenty sepoy to hold back the advancing enemy. Charging after him down the hill came fifty Pathans, brandishing their long Khyber knives, and shouting encouragement to each other. Leach halted, turned about and let them have a taste of disciplined rifle-fire which stopped them dead in their tracks and drove them under cover; but others dashed on past his flanks and the whole party was soon in danger of being surrounded. Leach realized that things could not go on like this and that he must do something, anything, to regain the initiative. So, deciding that aggression was the best form of defence, he ordered his men to fix bayonets, and suddenly charged back again up the mountainside, the last thing that the tribesmen had expected. Faced by this sudden change of tactics, their natural caution immediately reasserted itself and they drew back to consider this new development. Right over the crest they went, beyond Leach's original position, rather than have a dangerous and now unpredictable foe astride their line of retreat. Doubtful, and becoming short of ammunition, they crouched behind rocks, some only twenty yards away, firing the occasional shot. Those who had no more bullets to spare sustained their waning morale by throwing stones from a safe distance. Only three of them plucked up the courage to try a rush, and their disposal presented no problem. Then Leach seized the opportunity while the others were disconcerted to start down the hill again, followed now by

only a few careful individuals. Soon he came under the cover of carbine fire from his cavalry base, which was sufficient excuse for the last of the Shinwaris to break off the engagement and return home to boast of their valour.

Apart from Barclay, the only load to be carried the rest of the way was the body of a Sikh havildar – a native sergeant who had been shot through the head and killed instantly. But it was long, dreary, thirsty work before the party reached the foot of the mountain two hours later. Nobody molested them any further – nine Shinwaris had been killed, and that was enough. There must have been nearly three hundred of them in the battle, but only about half had been able, or had so far committed themselves as to bring their firearms to bear. Leach killed two tribesmen himself, and received a knife-thrust in the arm, sufficiently severe to result in his being invalided home to England; but he was back within the year, this time for survey duty in South Afghanistan. Sir Sam Browne had awarded him a brevet-majority for his party in the affair, and recommended him for the Victoria Cross, which he duly received.

CHAPTER 3

The Battle of Ahmad Khel

1

AFTER THE BRITISH victories Amir Shere Ali assumed that all was lost and fled to the safety of his northern fastnesses, accompanied by his Russian friends. There he died, and one of his sons, Sirdar Yakub Khan, seized power and at once began to make peace overtures. Yakub Khan's ability must have exceeded his looks – he was described as an insignificant little man with a receding brow and conical-shaped head – for he was certainly an astute bargainer. So intractable did he become that the Indian Government, to improve their negotiating position, ordered Sir Sam Browne to advance a further twenty miles towards Kabul and halt at Gandamak. Yakub Khan 'got the message' and went to meet him. And there, on 26 May, after three more weeks of haggling, a treaty was signed. The Amir, as he now styled himself, agreed to place the conduct of his foreign affairs entirely in British hands and to accept an Envoy in Kabul; while the Indian Government for its part would hand back Jalalabad and Kandahar. Sir Louis Cavagnari, Political Officer to Chamberlain's abortive Mission, was chosen to be Envoy and went to Kabul with his escort. Both sides began to implement the Treaty of Gandamak.

In the south, General Stewart's trip to Khelat-i-Ghilzai had been comparatively uneventful, and the two columns were now concentrated around Kandahar to sit out the cholera months of June and July. As an interim measure before evacuation, Amir Yakub Khan sent down an Afghan Governor-Designate for the province to work with the British. He was Sirdar Sher Ali Khan of the Barakzai ruling family, an official with more than average intelligence, well-versed in Afghan political affairs, who had governed several districts in his time. He was judged to be about

fifty-five years old, described as hawk-nosed with a pleasant and genial countenance; and reputed to be honest and not afraid to express his frank opinion, even to the Amir.

Down in the plains the Supply Organization along the lines of communication between Jacobabad and the foot of the Bolan Pass was experiencing its first hot weather since the commencement of operations. Now the full hostility of the Kachchi Plain was beginning to make itself felt. The Bombay Commissariat had started the campaign with two thousand four hundred carts, thoroughly good and strong, made of well-seasoned wood. But the best cart ever to be turned out from a workshop was unable to withstand for long the burning blast of the Kachchi Plain in April and May. Grass was bound around naves and spokes, and kept moist when possible. But the carts had to be in use continually, and despite all precautions spokes would get loose, felloes crack, and then some sudden jolt would cause complete collapse. Repair depots kept a dwindling number on the road by cannibalization, but the Commissariat was hard put to it to keep the wheels turning!

By June the fighting troops were all up among the mountains, while the staging posts over the Kachchi Plain were manned almost exclusively by followers, the civilian element of the Army. Eree ka Sher, a collection of rudely constructed grass-roofed sheds in the middle of a plain, lay stinking in the burning and almost deadly heat. The denizens lay on their rough string beds gazing apathetically as Lieutenant-Colonel Shewell of the Bombay Commissariat rode in through the searing glare. He was on his way to Sukkur and intended to resume his journey next morning.

During that night, cholera – the old, familiar scourge of the hot weather – broke out in the followers' quarters. The news was brought to Shewell, who would have been only too familiar with the symptoms after his years of service in India. A quick visit to the afflicted would have confirmed his fears, and he made up his mind to stay – there was no other white officer to take charge. He contacted Dadur by telegraph and arranged for a medical assistant to be sent to help, and was lucky to get his plea in before the epidemic hit Dadur also, and while the lines

were still open – a few days later the postal and telegraph officials both died during the course of a single night, two of the three hundred deaths in that small post alone.

In Eree ka Sher Shewell and his assistant watched night and day over the sick, who were not combatant soldiers, it must be remembered, but clerks, servants, even some of the lowest sweeper caste. The sufferers lay on their beds, or on blankets on the bare ground, some doubled-up from the pain in their intestines, others writhing in agony from cramps in their limbs and stomachs. Great, sunken eyes in pinched faces gazed imploringly at those ministering to them, and husky voices begged for water, more water, ever water! A few died within two or three hours from onset; others lasted for nearly two days, but when their dry, wrinkled skins began to turn blue and cold there was seldom any hope. The colonel was everywhere, comforting the dying, giving cheerful words of encouragement to those who were still grimly fighting for life, forcing unwilling helpers to carry out and bury the dead, or burn the corpses, according to religious belief, all amidst the foul stench inseparable from the disease. Ever he and his aide maintained their vigil, snatching a few moments of sleep at long intervals, until at last the dawn came bringing no new cases during the night, first sign that the cholera might have run its course.

Lieutenant-Colonel Shewell survived, only to die next year in Kandahar from wounds received during the withdrawal from Deh Kwaja. There was no need for him as a commissariat officer to be involved, but he left the fortress to help carry in the wounded.

Up in the hills there were a few casualties among the teeth arms, but these were men of better breed and physique, living under more tolerable conditions. Mostly, they shrugged off their illness and recovered.

2

At last came the 1st of September, 1879, that longed-for day when the evacuation of Jalalabad and Kandahar was to begin. Cheerfully the troops marched out, looking forward to the com-

parative amenities of peace-time India. Four days later came the ugly rumour, soon to be confirmed, that Cavagnari and his men in the capital city had been murdered by dissatisfied Afghan soldiery.

All British forces were immediately ordered to turn about and reoccupy the positions that they had just left, and a punitive expedition under Major-General Sir Frederick Roberts was despatched to Kabul. It was met on the way by a thoroughly frightened Yakub Khan, who claimed to have lost control of his people and had ridden into the British camp for protection. Sir Frederick took him on to Kabul, but soon found that he was likely to become a focus for resistance, so compelled him to abdicate. He was sent back down the passes to India, to remain a guest of the British Raj for the remainder of his days.

The loss of their Amir, the rigorous enforcement of martial law in Kabul, merciless retribution for Cavagnari's murder and the ruthless suppression of disaffection in the neighbouring countryside now combined to bring about a general revolt. It was fostered by the fanatic preaching of a ninety-year-old mullah, Mushk-i-Alam, and organized by Mahomed Jan, a chieftain and regular army artillery commander. Their army, ten thousand strong, drove back a British force sent to destroy them in the field, and besieged Roberts and his men in Sherpur, the old Afghan arsenal outside Kabul. In December they launched a grand assault, but the garrison held firm, eventually turning the tables and scattering the investing hordes with a vigorous counter-attack. This rendered the British safe from destruction, but they held only the ground that they actually occupied, and elsewhere anarchy ruled supreme. The Indian Government was no closer to establishing a firm, friendly ruler in Afghanistan, thereby claiming achievement of the original aim and having an excuse for ending this most unprofitable war.

At this juncture Sirdar Abdur Rahman reappeared on the Afghan political scene. A son of the late Shere Ali's elder brother, he had been exiled to Russian Turkestan as a penalty for fighting against his uncle in the civil war. There, he had been made much of by the authorities and sent to live in Samarkand on an allowance of twenty-five thousand roubles a year, an

appropriately princely sum in those days. He had the reputation of being a man of strength and ability, and Lord Lytton was searching desperately for just such an Amir to help implement his new policy – no less than to disrupt the Afghan State! So Lytton decided to open negotiations, and sent Mr Lepel Griffin to Kabul to start conversations. He was to have considerable powers of initiative and control, though still ultimately subordinate to Roberts, who had until then enjoyed complete political command. In effect, the general and the politician got on very well.

We now come back to Kandahar in the middle of March, 1880. So far, the province had presented no great problems. British military columns had been able to travel widely over the area with only minimal casualties, and there were no large hostile bands under arms. The Viceroy decided therefore to make this province independent of the rest of the amirdom and to appoint Amir Shere Ali's original nominee, Sher Ali Khan Barakzai, as Governor, or Wali, under the British. It was expected that he would be welcome to the populace in view of his rank and lineage, but to boost his authority the Indian Government promised him a gift of six thousand rifles, a million rounds of small-arms ammunition and a battery of smooth-bore artillery.

Lord Lytton was much more disturbed about Kabul, where Roberts was still having difficulties with the tribes, and where the talks with Abdur Rahman were soon to start. He intended, therefore, to make a show of force in Kabul at the expense of Kandahar by moving the latter's crack Bengal Army division up north and leaving Kandahar to be manned entirely with Bombay Army troops. Moreover, on the pretext of needing to have the whole of Afghanistan under one commander, he would send with it Sir Donald Stewart, the senior officer in the country. The Viceroy had a high regard for this great soldier, who combined military expertise with all the tact and skill required of a diplomat and civil administrator, and knew that he would be admirably suited for the political jugglings with Abdur Rahman.

There remained the third province of Herat, which had not changed much during its eighteen years under Afghan rule. It

was now a city in the middle of a well-irrigated and fertile plain of ten miles radius, a patch-work of orchards, vineyards and villages yielding every type of produce from apples to apricots, from mulberries to melons, from cabbages to onions. The fields were tended by the half-Persian, half Afghan Herati Tadjiks in their blue shirts and black skull-caps, cultivating their crops with primitive three-cornered spades. Small boys and girls watched over flocks of fat-tailed sheep and the occasional herd of cattle. Horses and camels abounded.

But the defences had not been rebuilt since the Persian siege. The walls were tumbledown, the gun emplacements had gone, the ditch was full of rubble, refuse and dead animals. Inside, however, 'the magnificent outlines of the Mosalla filled a wide space with the glorious curves of dome and gateway and the tapering grace of stately minars, the impressive beauties of the finest architectural structure in all Afghanistan'. It was destroyed in 1885, to improve the defences!

Three miles to the south lay the Hari Rud, a rolling spate of muddy turbulence in April, dwindling a few months later to a dry river bed after every drop of precious water had been diverted higher up for irrigation – the city inhabitants used their own wells and communal water-holes. Over plain and city a hot, dusty wind blew continuously for one hundred and twenty days from June to September.

The British Government had made an approach to Persia suggesting to the Shah that he might like to take over Herat, with the firm understanding that British troops should be allowed right of entry at any time considered necessary. But the Shah, while appreciating this generosity, declined the offer, indicating that he would not in any case be able to assume control of the province without fighting the Afghan Governor, Sirdar Ayub Khan, of whose views little account had been taken throughout all these machinations.

Ayub Khan was considered to be the most talented of Amir Shere Ali's sons. As a youth he had joined his brother Yakub Khan in the struggle to put his father on the throne, and remained with the former when he revolted against parental authority and seized Herat. Driven out by Shere Ali, Ayub took

refuge in Persia, but returned to maintain firm rule over the province when the British invasion destroyed law and order throughout the nation. He was now nearly thirty years old and already an experienced soldier and Eastern statesman. Political circles in India were fairly sure that he would not accept the suzerainty of his cousin Abdur Rahman, which was a matter for congratulation – it would further the policy of divide and rule. He was not considered to pose a threat to the British occupation.

In fact, Ayub Khan was biding his time. He had given asylum to those leaders from the southern territories who had preferred flight to living under subjection; and he had been joined by a substantial contingent of his late father's regular army of Kabuli troops. These were expensive to his exchequer and they bickered continually with his own Herati soldiers, but he devoted himself to composing their differences, sitting on the fence and planning for the future. No one had realized that he was undoubtedly aware of British intrigues with the Persians with whom he, too, had been dallying – he had got to know them well during his exile – and that he had been told of British plans for his province. He had, therefore, good grounds for supposing that he could not stay inactive and still survive in his position. His dilemma was that the Kandahar garrison was too strong for him to attack with any hope of success. What was more, Sir Donald Stewart had gained a reputation among the Afghans for integrity and unswerving justice during the eighteen months that he had been in Kandahar, qualities that were appreciated by that turbulent race, and which had played a significant part in keeping the peace. Ayub could not rely on a general uprising in his support should he decide to take the offensive.

Lord Lytton was going to change all that.

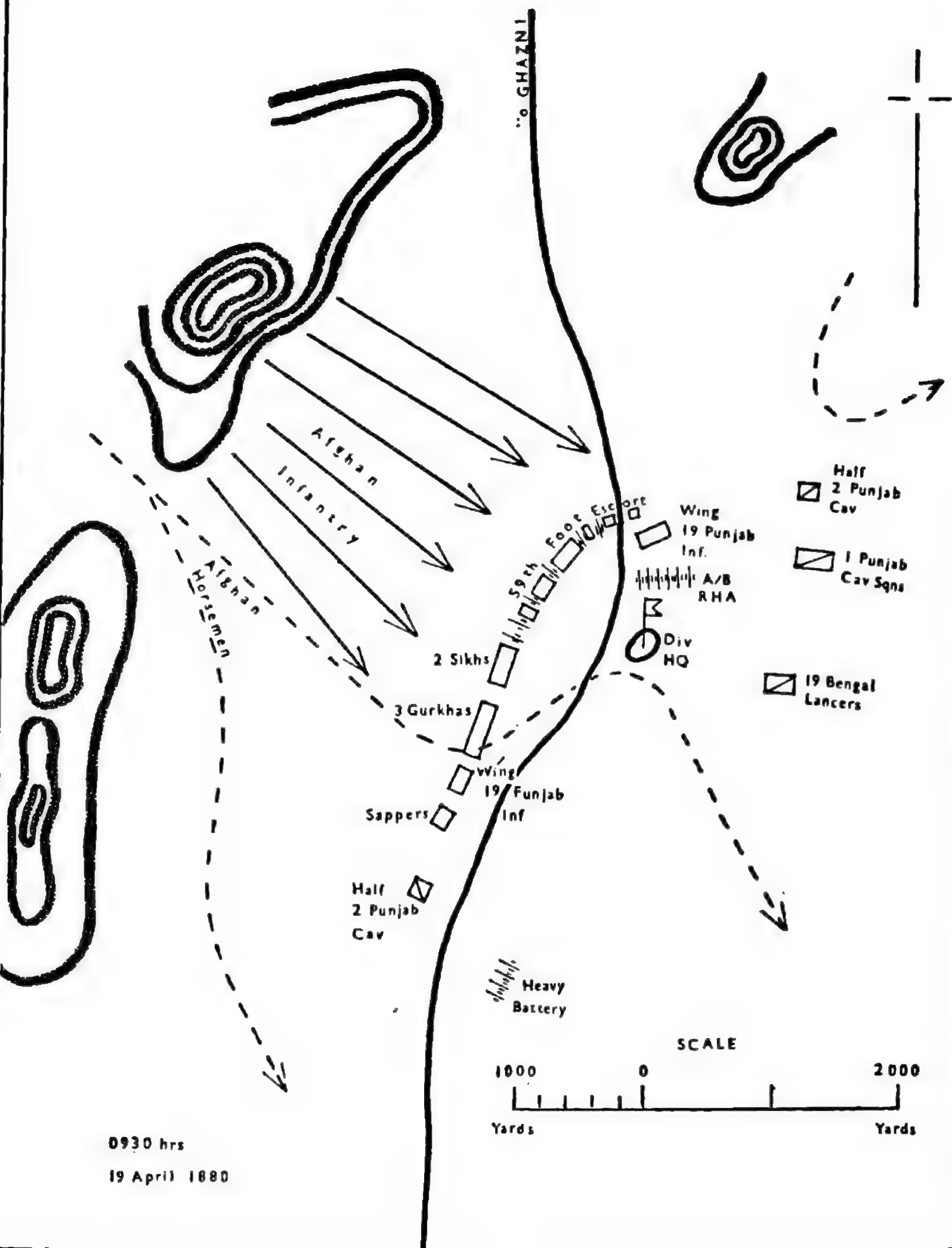
Sir Donald Stewart began to move his Bengal Division out from Kandahar on 27 March and marched the ninety miles to Khelat-

i-Ghilzai in easy stages, arriving ten days later in freezing temperature at a quarter to seven in the morning. He was not satisfied with the column's performance; there was too much delay in breaking camp and a tendency to straggle. So he weeded out every sickly or weak soldier, follower and transport animal for despatch back to Kandahar. Then, with the remaining seven thousand soldiers, six thousand followers and nine thousand animals he set off for Ghazni.

As the nights became warmer, so the days became hot by afternoon. Sir Donald could have availed himself of the special general's doolie but he had no intention of accepting any luxury denied to the men. He was, however, in his fifty-sixth year, and as a result suffered to some degree from the heat; particularly after reaching camp, waiting for the tents to come up and hot tea to be brewed. None the less, he was always in full possession of his faculties, and his wits were sharpened by the prospect of battle – an excellent tonic. At Khelat-i-Ghilzai he had heard reports that the Afghans were gathering, and for some time his cavalry screen had been sending in information that bodies of tribesmen were shadowing the division, their numbers increasing day by day as swarms of local villagers left their homes and joined the tribal army. It was very difficult to find out exactly what was happening as his own scouts were always driven back by the enemy if they tried to reconnoitre in depth, and no political intelligence was forthcoming. But Sir Donald estimated by the evening of 18 April that there were about nine thousand enemy close around him. He did not really expect an attack, as he thought it more likely that the Afghans intended to join forces with other dissidents in the Ghazni area, but decided that it would be better to be fully prepared for anything.

The night was spent at Mashaki, thirty miles south of Ghazni, and next morning at half-past four o'clock the Bengal Division broke camp and left in daylight, prepared for trouble. The advance guard was composed of the 19th Bengal Lancers; A/B Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, with six 9-pounder guns; the 19th Punjab Infantry Regiment; Divisional Headquarters and escort, and two companies of Bengal Sappers and Miners. Behind came the main body – 2nd Infantry Brigade, the Divisional

AHMAD KHEL



Artillery and the 2nd Punjab Cavalry Regiment. The mass of transport followed them, after which came the rearguard of 1st Infantry Brigade and the 1st Punjab Cavalry.

After seven miles, when it was still only half-past seven, the column stopped for a short rest and breakfast. There had been no delay in leaving camp, and the head of the transport was in its proper place behind the main body, although occupying three miles of road-space. Scarcely had they halted when a sowar from the forward cavalry came galloping back to report large numbers of enemy near the village of Ahmad Khel three miles ahead. They seemed to be waiting to dispute passage astride the road at a place where it went through some low hills, but there were indications of larger forces massing on the high ground to the left. Sir Donald immediately gave orders for the column to be concentrated for a quick deployment. He left the artillery in column of route on the road, but brought the infantry forward to march level with them off the road to the left. He despatched orderlies to tell the rearguard what was happening, and to order up two squadrons of the 1st Punjab Cavalry and half of 1st Brigade's infantry in case they should be needed. Then, led and flanked by cavalry, he resumed the advance. Soon more and more Afghan standards rose up on the mountain crests, and through glasses one could see a vast body of horse and foot. A little further, and the mullahs could be seen blessing the ghazis' weapons – their custom before battle. 'Very quiet and determined they looked on the top of their hills!' When the column was within a mile and a half of the enemy straddling the road the general brought his artillery into action to start shelling their positions. The Royal Horse Artillery dropped trails on the right of the road, watched over by a squadron of the 19th Bengal Lancers as local protection, and the field artillery occupied a position on the other side, guarded by a wing of the 19th Punjab Infantry. Sir Donald kept the 2nd Punjab Cavalry also on the right of the road, all squadrons grouped together under their commanding officer. Another squadron and a half of the 19th Bengal Lancers was employed to keep the left of the road under observation, acting as flank guard for the 2nd Infantry Brigade who were still stretching back beside the road in column of route. They

were headed by the 59th Foot, then the 2nd Sikhs, followed in rear by the 3rd Gurkha Regiment. As reserve the general kept under his own hand for immediate commitment if required not only the remaining half of the 19th Punjab Infantry, but also the fully combatant two companies of Sappers and Miners and his own escort – which was a company of 2/60th Rifles, another from the 25th Punjab Infantry Regiment and a troop of the 19th Bengal Lancers. Finally, in the rear with an appreciable gap between them and the cavalry on the left flank, the heavy battery was deployed on a piece of rising ground – very isolated, but the general wanted the heavy metal of their 40-pounder guns and 6.3-inch howitzers to be available for protecting the head of the transport column, as well as to cover the left of the fighting line. He then took up his own position on a small knoll in the centre, from which he could get a clear all-round view, ordered the infantry brigade to deploy into line by regiments to attack the Afghans blocking the Ghazni road, and the supporting artillery to open fire. It was nine o'clock.

At the time when the general issued his orders the infantry column was two or three hundred yards left of the road to keep out of the dust from the artillery, and for the same reason there would have been a hundred yards or so between each regiment. The contemporary sketch-maps show a length of anything between twelve hundred and two thousand yards. This was to become their battle line, for General Stewart's staff officer had not even finished passing his instructions to the infantry brigade commander, requesting him to deploy for a frontal attack, when they suddenly came under small-arms fire. At the same time tribal drums began their throbbing clatter, the high ground to the left seemed to rise to its feet and a Niagara of tribesmen and ghazis came pouring down the slopes towards them. Down rushed wave after wave of excited, bloodthirsty swordsmen plunging sure-footed over the rocks and crags, many on horseback, some armed with rifles or jezails, others no less determined carrying only home-made pikes. They were even in some form of line. Sher Jan, their leader, had known better than to give detailed orders but he had succeeded in installing some kind of a rough idea into the thickest skulls. This line was so great as to reach

beyond either end of the British position, itself possibly a mile in length, threatening to envelope and engulf the comparatively small force opposed to it. Behind these five thousand dedicated warriors the whole area was crowded with supporters swarming like ants over the foothills and plain as far as the eye could see. The forward elements had some distance to cover before coming to grips with the British and here again estimates of time and distance vary; but they probably started at least five hundred yards away, maybe further. This would have given the 59th Foot quite enough time to form line before the Afghans struck them – a story that some of them did not even have time to fix their bayonets is unlikely to be true!

But it was very different for the Gurkhas at the tail of the infantry column. They received Stewart's new orders to form line facing left, but were still in the process of doing so when an avalanche of tribal horsemen came pouring through a rocky gorge and charged towards them. The 19th Bengal Lancers saw the enemy coming and quickly grouped into formation for a counter-charge. But the tribesmen were galloping all out and covered the ground so quickly that they hit the Lancers with maximum force before their charge was properly under way, smashing right through them and hurling the disorganized remnants in struggling confusion through the 3rd Gurkhas and beyond them into the wing of 19th Punjab Infantry in divisional reserve. Fortunately, there were drills to be used on occasions like this when penetrations have been made, and a force cannot operate as a whole. With tribesmen infiltrated through gaps between companies, it was obviously quite impossible to form a regimental square, so the officers of both the regiments involved immediately gave orders to form company squares, thereby isolating disorganized elements and creating impregnable, disciplined units which began to pour lethal volleys of rifle-fire into the battling confusion of friend and foe. The *mêlée* burst through the regimental rear echelons, stampeding the ammunition mules and riding over the dressing stations, until it reached the foot of the knoll from which Sir Donald was directing the battle. Here the general himself took a hand in rallying the Lancers, helped most effectively by Mr. Warneford, the Divisional Chaplain.

This militant Christian, a crack shot with the revolver and accoutred with a great sword, was also equipped with a strong stick with which he so threatened a fleeing sowar that the trooper pulled up his horse on its haunches and turned to face the lesser peril! Their joint efforts were rewarded by the formation of a firm front against any further penetration, until the Afghans fled away across the plain to escape the vengeful volleys from the now fully operational company squares, leaving some of their dead within a few feet of where Sir Donald was standing. Then, cool as on parade, the Gurkhas unemotionally resumed the drill to form regimental line facing left, in time to begin firing volleys at the army of ghazis advancing on foot towards them. The Sikhs were already in position in line between the Gurkhas and the 59th Foot.

The Afghans had a good commander in Sher Jan. To coincide with the horse and foot engagements on the left of the road, he launched two thousand more horsemen from the other side, who came charging down to take the British infantry in rear. This time, however, there was a whole cavalry regiment five hundred strong ready and waiting for them, placed there for the very purpose. The 2nd Punjab Cavalry, led by their commanding officer, hit their opponents at full tilt with such devastating impact that the scattered survivors of the tribal horse fled the field, never to return. The Punjab Cavalry did not disperse in pursuit, but returned to take up their original position again, with a very satisfactory quota of bloodied sabres.

The advantage of deploying an infantry brigade in line is that it can then bring its maximum fire potential to bear to its front. The snag lies in that there is nobody to deal with an enemy coming from somewhere else. Either more troops have to be found to face the new threat, or the line itself has to be adjusted to deal with the situation. Now, as the Afghan main force began to close on the British infantry it became clear that many of their swordsmen were going to pass the right of the 59th and be able to attack them from the rear. As the general did not yet want to commit his reserve, he ordered the regiment to refuse its right flank – that is, to angle back some of the companies of the right wing to cope with this development. The 59th started

to comply, but the ghazis were so close and so encouraged by what they thought to be the beginning of a retreat that they fell upon the flank companies before the manoeuvre could be completed, throwing the regiment momentarily into confusion, in a wild hurly-burly of hand to hand fighting. As in the case of the Gurkhas, however, the order was given to form company squares, rallying points which enabled the 59th to isolate and destroy their assailants.

Sir Donald saw their difficulty and sent a staff officer with orders for the whole regiment to fall back slightly into line with the Sikhs, thereby securing their left flank which had been out in the open. At the same time he strengthened their right with the two companies of his escort which had been held in reserve, and the wing of the 19th Punjab Infantry which had been providing local protection for the field artillery. The guns themselves were withdrawn and brought into action again in gaps between companies of the 59th Foot, and between them and the 2nd Sikhs. The Royal Horse Artillery battery continued firing case – a shell packed with lead bullets, designed to burst soon after leaving the muzzle, and reversed shrapnel which had a similar effect – into the ghazi hordes until they were within thirty yards of the guns. Then the battery commander withdrew his 9-pounders two hundred yards to the foot of the general's knoll, rather than risk them being captured. He continued the action from there. To deal with the Afghan overlap on the brigade's left, Sir Donald committed all the rest of his reserve infantry – the second wing of the 19th Punjab Infantry and the two Sapper and Miner companies – on the left of the 3rd Gurkhas.

The situation began to look critical, and the general's infantry reserve was all totally committed. But his original forethought now paid off and the two squadrons of the 1st Punjab Cavalry, whom he had summoned from the rearguard as soon as the enemy had been seen, came cantering up to Divisional Headquarters. Sir Donald immediately formed them up with a squadron of the 19th Bengal Lancers and sent them hurtling into the ghazis menacing his right flank, driving them clear off the battlefield. Then he was able to release half of the 2nd Punjab Cavalry, waiting patiently in reserve since their first vic-

torious charge, to go over to the left and do a clean sweep of tribal cavalry trying to get among the baggage train. The heavy battery was able to support them during this operation.

Now, at last, steady fire from the Sikhs and Gurkhas in the centre began to tell. The enemy were falling in hundreds, their fanaticism began to flag, a few began to slink away towards the hills, and the movement was taken up by others until the whole army was streaming off in all directions. Thousands of tribesmen who had been watching to see which way the fight would go now melted quietly into the hills, where some of them attacked and slaughtered any fugitives with whose clans they happened to be at feud. Just before the cease-fire sounded, the two regiments of infantry from the rearguard came marching up and were put into action to support 2nd Infantry Brigade's centre.

The battle of Ahmad Khel was over. It was a quarter to ten o'clock, only three-quarters of an hour since the general had started to deploy for action, and a thousand enemy dead lay around the British line. They were most local Ghilzais, but included numbers of Zamindawar tribesmen from the Helmand who had been in the forefront of the fight. The Afghans are believed to have suffered total losses of about three thousand killed and wounded, out of a force of ten to fifteen thousand men.

Only eighteen hundred bayonets and seven hundred cavalry of the Bengal Division had actually been engaged, until the very end when reinforcements came up. Despite having been taken at a distinct disadvantage at the start, they had suffered only seventeen killed out of a hundred and forty-one casualties. The greater proportion of the losses were among the Bengal Lancers. As a contrast, the 3rd Gurkha Regiment did not suffer a single man killed or wounded in its fighting line, through being able under stress to form company squares quickly and correctly.

After two hours spent in burying the British dead, and finishing off ghazis feigning death who shot at the digging parties, the Division marched on towards Ghazni. The native regiments carried their fallen comrades with them, preferring to perform a more prolonged and leisurely ceremony in camp that evening.

The news of Ahmad Khel preceded Sir Donald to Ghazni, and instead of a defiant, embattled fortress he found the townsmen going about their normal peaceful occupations. Then came information that the mullah Mushk-i-Alam and Mahomed Jan, who had already tried conclusions with Roberts in the north, were assembling another army of thirty thousand men. Their advance guard of seven thousand had already occupied two villages six to seven miles away on the Kabul road. Determined to retain the initiative, Sir Donald decided to take immediate offensive action so as to allow the enemy as little time as possible to prepare his position, and to hit him hard before his main force had time to come up. So at half past three in the morning of 22 April he despatched Brigadier-General Palliser to try out the Afghan defences with two cavalry and four infantry regiments, supported by the Royal Horse Artillery and a mountain battery. The rest of the Bengal Division was drawn up outside the camp ready to move at five minutes notice.

Palliser found the enemy advance guard holding strong natural defences, and tried to goad them out of their positions; first by shelling, next by retiring a short way to lure them out, but for once these tactics failed to work. He knew that he could capture the villages, but only with unacceptable losses, so sent back to camp explaining the situation and asking for reinforcements. Sir Donald decided to throw in his maximum effort and to command the battle himself. As regards his base and transport, he accepted the risk that the enemy might deliberately be enticing him away so as to fall upon the baggage. So he sent a wing of the 19th Punjab Infantry to close the gates of Ghazni and keep the citizens contained within their walls. He left Major Tillard, commander of the heavy artillery battery, in charge of the camp with his guns, a wing of the 3rd Gurkha Regiment, and the two Sapper and Miner companies.

Leaving Major Tillard and his men working most energetically at digging trenches and piling barricades of camel-saddles as

breastworks in the gaps between them, the general and his troops took the road and soon arrived at Palliser's position, where the Afghans had still refused to be tempted from the security of their loop-holed walls. Assessing the situation, Sir Donald sent an infantry brigade supported by two cavalry regiments and the Royal Horse Artillery battery on a detour around to the right to turn the enemy's left flank and attack his position from the rear, once again keeping one complete cavalry regiment to watch his own left, and the second wing of the 19th Punjab Infantry. Then, as soon as the flank attack was fully developed he deployed his other infantry brigade into line and descended on the defenders, supported by fire from the field and mountain batteries. At the sight of the lines of disciplined, determined infantry advancing on them from two sides at once, the Afghans made off with all speed to avoid being caught in a trap, and by one o'clock the battle was over. The enemy were reported to have lost one hundred and fifty dead and a further two hundred and fifty wounded, compared with British casualties of only two killed and three hurt. Although the physical loss to the Afghan advance guard, disproportionate though it may have been, was negligible, the loss of morale was considerable and the remaining twenty thousand men of Mahomed Jan's army dispersed without offering battle.

There was no more opposition awaiting Sir Donald on his journey, and he marched through glorious weather to enter Kabul and take over command from Sir Frederick Roberts on 2 May. Sir Frederick felt that it was a bit hard to be superseded, but accepted the fact with good grace. After all, he and Sir Donald had been good friends for many years – twenty-eight years earlier Lieutenant Roberts had rescued the wife and family of Lieutenant Stewart after their doolie bearers had deserted them in the jungle!

Sir Donald also assumed full control over the negotiations with Abdur Rahman, who had adopted the habitual Afghan bargaining stance of wanting everything and offering nothing. He received a telegram from Lord Lytton suggesting that perhaps it might be better after all if Mr Lepel Griffin should remain in charge of this aspect, but Sir Donald replied that any

attempt to limit his authority to purely military matters must coincide with his recall. The Viceroy assured him at once that he would indeed have supreme political and military powers.

CHAPTER 4

New Faces in Kandahar

1

THE SOUTH AFGHANISTAN FIELD FORCE now came under General Phayre, who had established his headquarters at Chaman. The Kandahar Field Force also had a new commander, General Primrose, and only Nuttall remained of the brigadier-generals. Political continuity had been maintained in the person of Major St John, General Stewart's political adviser. An ex-schoolmaster from the Bombay Presidency, he was very well thought of in Indian Government circles. He was now to be promoted to lieutenant-colonel and appointed Political Resident in South Afghanistan with full political control. This was on the advice of Sir Donald who had little confidence in the experience and political acumen of his successor-designate, an officer of the British establishment.

The lines of communication bore a continuous stream of Bombay Army regiments marching up from the south to reconstitute the garrison, and to receive their first taste of active service conditions since many years. New personalities began to arrive on the scene, some of them destined to play significant roles in the near future. One of these was Brigadier-General Henry Francis Brooke, Adjutant-General of the Bombay Army, ordered forward on 20 March, 1880, to take command of the 2nd Bombay Infantry Brigade at Kandahar.

Brooke was in his early forties. His photograph shows a strong, determined face with minimal brown side-whiskers and cavalry moustache. Strongly built, he estimated his riding weight in field service marching order as fifteen stone. He had served as an infantry subaltern in the siege and capture of Sevastopol, and as aide-de-camp to Sir Robert Napier in China, where he was severely wounded at the assault on the Taku Forts. After

ten years of regimental duty he joined the Presidency Staff Corps and had been working in an office for eight years. Despite this, he still retained all the instincts of an active service combatant officer. He was full of energy, believed in seeing for himself and in getting things done in the right way with no delay. He accepted responsibility, and always issued confirmation of his orders in writing to eliminate any possibility of misunderstanding, even under the most hazardous conditions. Once he had given an order, he never on any account changed it – as he states proudly in the journal of his campaign.

He does not appear to have had advance warning of his posting, but none the less managed to embark for Karachi within a week of being told. During that time he acquired a Portuguese cook-general, two new horses, a Sam Browne belt and a Spartan collection of camp kit and comforts – including two cases of whisky! Exactly a week later he was at railhead, which had been pushed forward from Jacobabad to Sibi, leaving only three marches to the foot of the Bolan Pass. Not for him the arduous trek across the Kachchi Plain, but a quite pleasant rail journey.

After detraining and unloading the horses, he discovered behind a nearby sand-hill the tent of his old friend Brigadier-General Burrows, until recently Quartermaster-General of the Bombay Army. Burrows was in charge of the lines of communication between Sibi and Quetta, responsible both for maintaining an even flow of reinforcements and supplies, and for their protection. He was about to move off with a punitive column to avenge the death of Captain Showers of the irregular levies, who had been ambushed and slain. Brooke had originally feared that it might now be his turn for lines of communication duty, but had found a telegram waiting for him at Karachi, ordering him direct to Kandahar. He rather regretted this, feeling that there might be more fun chasing bandits like Burrows. However, there was nothing that he could do about it, so he concentrated on his arrangements for the march to Quetta. First, he collected a party to accompany him, consisting of Colonel French, who was to become Commander of the Royal Artillery in Kandahar; Lieutenant Fox who was to join a battery there; Lieutenant-Colonel Anderson of the Bombay Grenadiers,

travelling up to rejoin his regiment after a spell of sick leave in England; and Captain Collis, who was to be Brigade-Major to General Phayre.

Brooke, as a brigadier-general, was entitled to bullock-cart transport for his baggage, but opted instead for camels, feeling that he should leave the bullocks for those less fortunate than himself. The consequences of this philanthropy are best described in his own words :

‘I was woke at 1 o’clock, and after dressing almost in the dark began to have the camels loaded, but everything was against us. First of all, for the six camels sent for mine and Wm. French’s baggage, only one camel driver appeared, and he seemed perfectly ignorant of everything connected with camels, and more especially with that most delicate of arrangements, the loading of a camel; and to make matters worse he proved to be a wild villager from the neighbouring hills, whose language we could not understand, nor could he understand us. Then nearly all the ropes and harness required for the pack saddles were wanting, and the saddles themselves were of the most antiquated patterns. After many delays these minor difficulties were partially overcome, and after at least an hour spent in vain attempts to load the six camels, we had the proud satisfaction of seeing two of the lot ready for a start, when a demon entered into the two loaded animals, who rose from the ground (camels sit down to be loaded) and kicked the whole of their loads off. In the first instance this was rather ludicrous, and we laughed at it, and began again; but when 4 o’clock came, and daylight (which meant intense heat) began to appear, and yet not one camel could be induced to let the loads remain on their backs, things looked serious, and we despaired of getting off at all. However, we determined to make one final effort, and this time were so far successful that we made a start at 5 a.m., meeting the rest of our party about a mile out of Sibi, and heard to our distinct satisfaction that they had been equally unfortunate, and had only succeeded in getting off after many failures. The only wonder was that we got off at all, as it turned out that the camels had only been purchased two or three days, and were perfectly untrained. Our satisfaction at effecting a move was but of short

duration, as we had not gone a mile before half the loads were on the ground, and had to be repacked again and again.'

There were fewer difficulties next day, and after loading, the senior officers discovered the need to ride on ahead to inspect some transport and commissariat depots, leaving their juniors to bring on the camels. It goes without saying that these recalcitrant and versatile beasts managed to rid themselves of their burdens many times during the march, so that 'our two young friends who were in charge arrived thoroughly tired and done up'. A plunge in the clear, cool waters of the Bolan River soon put them to rights.

On the following day, the camel carrying the brigadier-general's two trunks dropped them into a river. They were recovered after having spent some time completely immersed, ruining his books and papers. Finally, five days out of Sibi, the camel drivers found themselves sufficiently close to home, and deserted during the night, taking their animals with them. So in the end the party had to fall back on bullock-carts; luckily there were some available.

The days were hot, so the group soon settled into a routine of rising at four o'clock and marching at five, aiming to arrive at the end of the day's stage at eight. The transport would come in considerably later. The lines of communication were well organized by this time, and the staging posts had sheds available for use during the heat of the day, or at the worst large tents. Officers were in charge of some posts, sergeants were responsible for others.

Brooke was concerned for the morale of personnel strung out along the road, living alone in the deserts for months on end, so he questioned two sergeants of the 66th Foot who were in charge of transport depots at Pir Chowki and Mach. The man at the former was perfectly happy with his fishing in the Bolan River, which was full of fish 'of the most confiding nature' who would take any bait or could be caught by hand at night using a light! The other had plenty to do all day, and the nights were much too short for the amount of sleep that he would have liked. But he complained bitterly about the lack of birds. 'When I see a country as has no birds I think badly of that country!' he said.

Brooke was impressed by their smartness and efficiency, and also that of the native NCOs, who displayed much more initiative than he would have expected, alone and away from their regiments for the first time.

The Bolan Pass was crossed without incident, and the party reached Quetta on 11 April, eight days after leaving Sibi. There, houses after the English fashion were already beginning to spring up, and Brooke and his friends were made honorary members of the Club, with its excellent accommodation and library. Brooke dined one night with Sir Robert Sandeman, and found that his host very much favoured moving into Afghanistan completely. Brooke disagreed, and there was a spirited discussion!

They moved on again after a stay of only two days. The country was said to be disturbed so Brooke obtained an escort of half a troop of cavalry, and a half-company of infantry, the latter to guard the baggage on the march and provide sentries at night. At the foot of the Khojak, however, he received a telegram from General Phayre at Chaman requiring him to come forward at all speed, so he set off with one British officer and five sowars, leaving the rest of the column to move forward on its own.

He arrived in Chaman by early afternoon, where General Phayre told him that a commissariat depot at Gatai, sixteen miles away, had been attacked and partially looted; while at Dubbrai, ten miles further on, the garrison had been killed, and the depot ransacked. A wing of native infantry had already been sent to Gatai, and Brooke was given a troop of cavalry to escort him there. He left at once, as he was in a hurry to get to Gatai before dark and see the defences in daylight. But on arrival he was pleased to find that the officer in charge had already done everything possible to fortify the depot, even to blocking the gate with sacks of grain.

Brooke had travelled forty-three miles since dawn that day and was now supposed to wait at Gatai until two companies of the 7th Fusiliers and two mountain guns caught up with him. But he could not bear the thought of leaving Dubbrai unoccupied and the dead unburied, so at first light next day he took forward what cavalry and infantry he judged could be spared. Luckily

he met no opposition and found Dubbrai empty except for dead bodies, and a sorely wounded ghazi who 'regularly spit at us and defied us' until he died next day.

Major Waudby of the 19th Native Infantry had been in charge at Dubbrai, with two of his own sepoy. The rest of the garrison were helpless, unarmed servants of his, and of the commissariat establishment. It transpired that he had had eight hours warning of the raid, but chose certain death rather than that it should be said in the bazaars that a sahib had deserted his post. Brooke writes: 'He must have fought splendidly as the enemy themselves acknowledge that they had sixteen killed and eighteen wounded, which was very good shooting. Nearly everyone we saw of the enemy was shot right through the head, so poor Waudby must have been as cool and collected as if he had been shooting pheasants. His two sepoy died with him, and were found beside him. We also found his dog sitting beside his body refusing to be moved. The poor dog had two terrible sword-cuts on his back, but is recovering and will be sent home to Mrs Waudby.'

Brooke now telegraphed Kandahar, suggesting that he should stay for a few days and show the flag by marching his column through the disaffected districts. But General Primrose repeated his order to come on to Kandahar. There was no trouble for the rest of the journey. Impatient to get in, Brooke borrowed a trotting camel from a local chieftain to carry his bag and bedding, and covered the last twenty-five miles in three and a half hours. He passed unharassed through the fortified villages on the way, whose inhabitants had been known to fire upon travellers, to arrive on 22 April, one month and two days after receiving his posting orders, and in time for breakfast with General Primrose!

2

Lieutenant-General Primrose was outwardly a well-knit, soldierly figure, about sixty years of age; but he was not healthy physically.

His appointment had been made only as a result of Horse Guards protests that all senior posts in Afghanistan Field Forces were held by officers of the Presidency Services. In consequence of these importunities he had been removed despite his wishes from a comfortable position commanding the Poona Division and sent north on active service.

He was to have three brigadier-generals under him in Kandahar. The 1st Infantry Brigade would be commanded by Brigadier-General Burrows, who had obtained his commission in the Bombay Infantry as long ago as 1844, so that he was now about fifty-five years old. He had the reputation of being an efficient staff officer, but had never managed to get to a theatre of war since the Mutiny. In 1872 he had been promoted brevet-colonel and appointed Deputy Quartermaster-General in Headquarters, Bombay Army, succeeding to the post of Quartermaster-General as a brigadier-general two years later. And there he had stayed until selected to command an infantry brigade in war. The commander of the Cavalry Brigade, Brigadier-General Nuttall, was junior to both Burrows and Brooke. He had an excellent record in civil employ and on police duties, so had been passed over the head of a number of other officers to command an infantry brigade in Biddulph's division. Then during the many reshuffles before Sir Donald Stewart's departure he had lost his infantry brigade but got the Cavalry Brigade instead, although he was reputed never to have served in a cavalry regiment. He was acclaimed as a good comrade, but even his friends had some doubts about his military potential in the field.

So Brooke found himself commanding not only the 2nd Infantry Brigade but all the troops in Kandahar, as Burrows, to whom he was junior, had not yet come up from Sibi. He spent his first day collecting a staff, to which he nominated Captain Law of the Royal Artillery as Brigade-Major pending the arrival of his own choice, Captain Leckie; and he managed to obtain Lieutenant Fox (who was at least now experienced with camels) as his Orderly Officer. Next day he assumed his appointment and immediately set off for a quick look around his regiments, to see their positions and to check for any weaknesses; he wanted to be sure that he would know exactly what to do if

trouble should break out during the first night of his command. Then he spent the next week, mornings and afternoons, making more detailed examinations and ordering any changes that he thought necessary. Experienced in sieges and assault on fortresses, he did not like what he saw and wanted to level all the houses, walls and cemeteries in a broad swathe around the perimeter. He knew that these would give excellent hiding places to snipers and cover for storming parties. He had heard already at this early stage that there were signs that it was going to be a bad year; rains had been poor, reservoirs were low and there was threat of famine. Moreover, hatred of the British had been given time to mature, and Afghan pride had been dangerously wounded by being subjected to foreign occupation. Worst of all, the imposition of Sher Ali Khan as Wali had back-fired. He was quite unable to conceal that he was taking his instructions from the hated invader, and everywhere the mullahs were preaching against him and calling for jihad, a holy war. His plight was basically the same as that of Shah Shuja in Kabul forty years earlier, and the lesson had been forgotten. But there was no immediate threat of large-scale hostile action, and political considerations of appeasement prevailed – a bequest of Sir Donald Stewart's policy of avoiding antagonising the local inhabitants any more than was absolutely necessary. So nothing could be done.

Most of the garrison lived outside the west wall of the city. General Primrose occupied a native house inside a walled garden consisting of small oddly-shaped rooms with very thick walls to keep out heat and cold, and a flat roof for sleeping on in the hot weather. It was clean and comfortable, and many of the inside walls were ornamented with paint and gilding. In the garden, which was irrigated by narrow channels of clear water, were roses, fruit trees and vines. Colonel St John and his assistant shared another house in the same enclosure. Around about were encamped the regiments, some of them living in the buildings of the old cantonment constructed by General Nott in 1839, which were still in fairly good condition; others occupied Afghan villages from which the owners had been evicted. Brooke had been allotted four rooms at one end of a hut with mud floors

six inches deep in dust, doorways without doors and windows without frames! This meant one room each for himself, his brigade-major and his orderly officer, and the other was set aside as a communal dining-room. By virtue of his rank the brigadier-general had also his own private bathroom – nobody else had one. At the other end of the hut Brooke earmarked similar accommodation for Burrows and his staff, who he hoped would join in – too small a mess was apt to result in officers getting on each other's nerves after a time.

The regiment holding the citadel in Kandahar was rather better off, as the personnel lived in native houses, many of which had gardens with trees and shade. All the same, Brooke thought that Kandahar equated with a fifth or sixth-rate Indian town. There was only one mosque, and it was very undistinguished. Nor was there anything unusual about the bazaar – craftsmen working in their shops, and the usual display of goods from Birmingham and Manchester. People seen in the streets were usually fine handsome men; women seldom appeared, and those who did were always very old, veiled from head to foot. Perhaps a lesson had been learned from what went on in Kabul during the first Afghan War, when high-born Afghan ladies had more freedom of movement. Subedar Sita Ram records that they found British officers, military and political, to be very attractive, worth visiting and most cooperative!

But Kandahar differed in one important respect from its Indian equivalent – the inhabitants were hostile and would lose no opportunity of killing an infidel. Starting with Lieutenant Willis, there had been incidents almost weekly. At any time a fanatic might come charging from a doorway howling that he was a ghazi, and rush slashing to the attack with his long knife. They were hardly ever successful, and were nearly always bayoneted, or caught and executed, but there seemed to be an endless supply. Sometimes they worked in groups, as on Christmas Day, 1879, when five men walked into the lines of the 59th Foot, drew concealed knives and shouted that they had come to kill anyone they could. Of course, they were shot down before they could do any harm, but with such a fusillade that five British soldiers were killed by their own side – a great consola-

tion to the ghazis in their paradise! Age made no difference. To quote Brooke again: "One boy who tried to stab one of our native servants is really quite a child, but as savage untamed a little viper as I ever saw. It is very hard to know how to deal with this young rascal, but I think a good whipping in a public place every other day for a month would be the best punishment.'

So everybody moved about in parties of two or three, the officers armed with revolvers and the men with their rifles. Soldiers had been in the habit of loading before going into the city, or carrying loose rounds readily available. But after one of them had killed two of his comrades with a single bullet, while the assailant escaped, Brooke put an end to the practice. He made them fix bayonets instead, with permission to use pouch ammunition only in extremity, when the situation really warranted it. It never did.

Outside cantonments in the countryside the danger came from men lying in ambush behind walls, whence they would open fire on parties going by and vanish before cavalry could be sent after them. The villagers around Kokeran, in particular, were quite expert at these tactics. Brooke was now spending a lot of time riding out to familiarize himself with the ground, and Primrose insisted that he took at least two sowars as escort, four if he was going further than five miles away.

It was usually possible, however, to make some form of compromise between garrison life and the need for continual readiness to deal with surprise attack. For example, on Sundays there would be a full-scale church parade – but everybody would be fully armed.

Brigadier-General Burrows turned up in due course, accompanied by his Brigade-Major, Captain Heath, and his Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General, Captain Harris. They agreed to club together with Brooke's entourage to form a mess, which was joined by the chaplain, Mr Cane. The mess was run by Colonel Beville, the Deputy Judge-Advocate, and became really quite comfortable. Doors and windows were improvised and a certain amount of make-shift furniture was acquired. Meals were organized on 'camp fashion' principles – everyone produced his own chair, plates, cup, glasses and cutlery so that anyone could

leave at a moment's notice with full kit without inconveniencing everybody else. In view of varying tastes and finances, each officer produced his own wine, beer and tea. The mess only produced the food, which was catered for by Colonel Beville, who liked good things and fed them all very well – under the circumstances.

3

Ayub Khan chose this time to announce his firm intention of marching on Kandahar. The departure of Sir Donald Stewart and the Bengal Division had finally persuaded him that he stood to lose nothing and possibly gain a lot by going over to the offensive. His publicized aim was to drive the infidel from the land, a most praiseworthy ambition from the point of view of the mullahs and guaranteed to bring him popular support. But this was probably a screen for his real ultimate objective, which was to reunite the three provinces of Herat, Kandahar and Kabul under his own rule as Amir. He may have felt that his claim as a royal prince surpassed that of his nephew Abdur Rahman, shamed by entering into negotiations with the hated foe.

His method would be to expel the British Army by force, or at least make it uneconomical for the Indian Government to continue with the campaign. The occupation troops were not concentrated, the majority were at Kabul and the remainder at Kandahar, so he would be able to take them on in turn. He would have to attack Kabul at some time, but he had to decide whether to go there first, or after capturing Kandahar. There was a direct road from Herat to Kabul, just passable and with a meagre sufficiency of supplies along the way – to be garnered in summer only; and on arrival at the other end he would meet the redoubtable Generals Stewart and Roberts, both with resounding victories to their credit and a battle-trained army behind them. Besides, he could not hope to win without a local uprising to bolster his own regulars and countrymen, which

might not be forthcoming, as some of the Kabuli tribesmen might stay loyal to Abdur Rahman.

If, on the other hand, he went initially for Kandahar he would have a comparatively easy journey over a road which remained open all year round, a significant advantage in case withdrawal should become necessary at any time. Moreover, he would be taking on the weaker garrison, with an untried commander. Finally, and most important of all, he could be sure of unanimous support from the surrounding countryside in overwhelming numbers. His court was teeming with their leaders—refugees, but influential men who had been urging him for months to aid them in regaining their lands and positions. The Wali was discredited, a traitor and a puppet. The Zamindawar, smarting from their defeats at Khushk-i-Nakhud and Ahmad Khel, would rise in concert with every chieftain from Farah to Chaman. He could call upon not only the ghazi, but also every khan, warrior and peasant who was chafing under two years of alien domination. He should, therefore, be able to take Kandahar without an unacceptable degree of loss to his own Herati adherents—always an important consideration—and would be in an immeasurably stronger position for an advance on Kabul in the role of national hero and liberator.

His Kabuli contingent, larger than his own regular army, was naturally demanding to be led back to their own city by the mountain route over which so many of its members had filtered into his dominions. But the promise of an advance on Kabul after looting the defeated British of their ordnance and stores in Kandahar was enough to sway them towards agreeing with his plans, and to reconcile such difficulties as still existed between them and their Herati allies.

The Sirdar was greatly encouraged by the immediate sequel to his declaration of intent—no less than the defection of a certain Nur Mahommed Khan, known as the Sirtip, or Cavalry Commander, a great entertainer of British officers, and an important henchman of Wali Sher Ali Khan, who now left his master to foment rebellion among the Zamindawar clans. Such a defection could not fail to impress ignorant men, who would consider that if a chief of such importance had declared for

Ayub Khan, the British must be in grave straits indeed. All that the Wali could do was to annex the Sirtip's property and throw his young son into prison.

Wali Sher Ali Khan was a man for whom Sir Donald Stewart had developed a strong personal liking. It was generally admitted that no other sirdar could have filled the post so faithfully, as he was a man of honour; he had pledged his faith to the British, so from them he had no secrets. Unfortunately he lacked the qualities for ruling so lawless a people. He had to face disaffection among his own tribal levies from the very beginning, but Sir Donald had refused to intervene as such interference would have lowered Sher Ali Khan's prestige still further. The general had gone so far as to consider moving some distance away from Kandahar to show that the governor did not rely on British arms alone to survive in office. The Wali's cavalry, however, recruited from a higher class and one more closely related to himself, remained loyal and with their aid he had been able to pave the way for Sir Donald's march to Kabul, sending ahead to arrange supplies. And although his troops in the west had been attacked by the Zamindawar, losing officers and men, he was successful in dispersing several bodies of tribesmen in the valleys south-east of Kandahar.

The official durbar inaugurating Sher Ali Khan as Wali of the Province of Kandahar on behalf of Queen Victoria was held in his palace on 11 May. The proceedings began with cups of tea without milk or cream being handed around, then followed speeches and presentations of gifts from the Queen and the Viceroy. Finally trays of Afghan sweets and iced sherbet flavoured with musk were brought in, and the Wali insisted that everybody, including the guard of honour, should partake of them. Brooke felt that he might have liked these delicacies better thirty or forty years earlier – but noticed that his orderly officer, Fox, found them much to his taste.

Two days later Sher Ali Khan paid a return visit to General Primrose and the whole garrison turned out to line the route. No presents were brought this time, as the Wali was aware that the British Government would not allow its servants to accept anything of value. Later, however, he sent each of his hosts as

a memento of the occasion one of the new gold coins that he had struck for general issue, a little gesture which was very much appreciated. He had found an old gold mine in the vicinity, and was rather disconcerted when Brooke, on one of his rides, found him at the bottom of the shaft, checking his resources.

There was another big parade for the Queen's Birthday on 29 May, with a Royal Horse Artillery battery present to take its privileged place on the right of the line, two other artillery batteries, three regiments of cavalry, and five regiments of infantry drawn up in one long line of two ranks.

Whenever parades of this sort were held, and artillery were available, it was customary for a twenty-one gun salute to be fired. Naturally, the guns were not brought into action pointing towards the parade, but despite this they did make quite a lot of noise – even with blank ammunition. This could create difficulties for officers, who had only their left hands free to hold the reins as the other held a drawn sword. If one gave first priority to steadiness on parade, it was possible to appear mounted on a despondent old troop-horse who could not care less about gun-fire. On the other hand, it was rather a matter of pride to show off one's spirited and very impressive best charger, and hope that all would be well, and in fact it was usually fairly easy to cope with the artillery salute. A mounted officer could gauge the interval between shots after the second round and give a strong squeeze with his knees a split second before each bang, which gave the horse something different to think about at the crucial moment. But there was also a part of the ceremony which was another matter entirely, the infantry's *feu-de-joie* (known to the irreverent as 'furious joy'). The right-hand man of the front rank fired his rifle, followed by the man on his left almost simultaneously, and every soldier in turn down the line to the left, the noise rippling away into the distance and then returning from the left of the rear rank all the way back to the right rear of the parade. Horses did not mind the fire starting and going away but could be very unsettled – to say the least – by the staccato crackle returning louder and louder, to end like a whip-lash behind them. Burrows and Brooke were both on parade at the head of their brigades, and both survived the salute. But

when it came to the *feu-de-joie* Brooke had great difficulty in controlling his fine young Arab charger, while Burrows, an excellent horseman, was thrown by his steed! Brooke felt quite repaid for the little bother he had by the admiration Akbar's appearance called forth as he went past the saluting base.

By now Brooke had done all he could to improve the defences of Kandahar city and cantonment. He knew his troops and was sufficiently content with their training as to be able to leave them to get on with it, paying only occasional visits. He now set himself to detailed reconnaissance of the outlying areas and settled to a routine of riding twenty to twenty-five miles before breakfast, and eight to ten miles every evening. Sometimes he would make a round trip of up to thirty-five miles, accompanied occasionally by Colonel French, or by Law and Captain Slade of the Royal Horse Artillery, who were both 'enterprising fellows'. He found usually that other officers tended to cry off on one pretext or another, 'the real truth, however, being that they were too lazy, and did not like the idea of a thirty-five mile ride starting at four o'clock in the morning'.

The trips were along tracks or across country. There were no roads, and not a single wheeled vehicle in the area except for those brought there by the British. Everything was carried on the backs of animal transport. Brooke discovered a complete change in the countryside after getting away from the stony, dusty plain of Kandahar. He found himself riding among fields with magnificent crops of wheat and barley, meadows full of clover and orchards with every kind of fruit-tree. Every field had a water-channel flowing through it, so there was plenty of jumping, although some of the obstacles were very awkward! The local farmers were not actually glad to see him, but were not uncivil, and many of them offered fruit as he rode by. It was not long before Brooke reckoned that he knew every inch of the ground within twelve to fifteen miles of the cantonment.

CHAPTER 5

The Girishk Column

1

WALI SHER ALI KHAN had problems in obtaining reliable intelligence, as his adherents tried to curry favour by telling him only what they thought he would like to know, and tended to suppress unpalatable news. He was sufficiently in phase with Ayub Khan's mental processes to believe that he probably would advance on Kandahar at some time, but the question was – when? On 24 May he heard that the Sirdar had resolved the arguments between his Heratis and Kabulis and would soon be moving out from the capital. A stronger indication of his intent was that he had gone so far as to order the farmers of Farah, on the Kandahar road, to cut their crops early so that supplies would be available for his army when he passed through the district on his way to battle. He was, moreover, said to be in correspondence with the chieftains of the Zamindawar clans. This last piece of information struck home, as Sher Ali Khan considered the Zamindawar to be *his* vassals, and his pride of ownership was outraged. So much so that he made up his mind that something must be done at once to forestall an armed rising of the peasantry in the Helmand River area. So strongly did he feel that within a week he had his whole army marching out of Kandahar bound for Girishk – and a fine impressive force he thought it to be. He had cavalry and infantry, six thousand men armed with the new rifles presented by the British; and he was especially proud of his smooth-bore artillery battery of four 6-pounder guns and two 12-pounder howitzers, brought up from India by Captain McMath of the 66th Foot, and handed over at Chaman. There was plenty of ammunition for both rifles and artillery.

Unfortunately, events do not always work out as anticipated. On reaching Girishk the Wali found before very long that his brave show of force was not having the expected result. So far from his presence overaweing the populace and counteracting Ayub Khan's propaganda, instead the local feelings of disaffection began to have an adverse effect on the loyalty of his own men. Waverers became even more uncertain of their allegiance when they heard that Ayub had actually crossed his provincial Rubicon, the Hari Rud, on 21 June. The tribesmen and peasantry became even less inclined to support Sher Ali Khan when he took energetic measures to collect the long-overdue Zamindawar taxes!

The Wali must have realized that he could not stop the Sirdar with his own unreliable troops. But there was plenty of time to summon help. Ayub Khan would have to follow the traditional trade route from Herat over three hundred and fifty miles of road, although there was no pass of any significance to be surmounted and no great river to cross – on the contrary, there were long stretches where water would already be scarce. Sher Ali Khan had no intention of letting an enemy into his territory, and he thought that his own men would fight if properly supported. So he sent back to his friends in Kandahar asking for a British force to back him up.

This request, simple though it might have appeared to Sher Ali Khan, immediately led to dissension between the Politicals and the Military at every level from Kandahar at one end of the scale to Simla, summer seat of the Government of India, at the other. St John was convinced that the Wali must be given active support, while senior officers of the Kandahar Field Force maintained that the despatch of any column of sufficient strength to make an impression – let alone protect itself – would weaken the garrison to an unacceptable degree.

The Kandahar garrison at this time, the end of June, was made up of two thousand, six hundred and fifty bayonets, five hundred and fifty sabres and sixteen guns or mortars. All the artillery was muzzle-loading except for a battery of 40-pounder Armstrongs, the modern guns of the day, breech-loading and rifled. This gun had been designed by the British firm of Arm-

strong in 1854 and had been given its operation trials in China. It was not a sufficient success entirely to overcome military conservatism, and only a few were introduced into the British Army – although numbers were sold abroad to foreign governments. Outside Kandahar an outpost was maintained at Khelat-i-Ghilzai composed of two companies from the 66th Foot, the complete 2nd Baluchi Regiment and a detachment of the 3rd Sind Horse. General Primrose had been given firm orders that this force was not to be reduced by as much as a single man, for fear of encouraging the Afghans in the north, and to keep some form of obstacle to any possible move on Kabul, by-passing Kandahar, by Ayub Khan.

Primrose eventually gave way to St John's urgings and telegraphed Simla to say that he could if necessary send a brigade out to Girishk. The Government of India Political Service naturally supported St John, but the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Frederick Haines, refused to agree on the grounds that the garrison remaining to defend Kandahar would be too small. The problem had, therefore, to be submitted to England for a decision by the Secretary of State, Lord Cranbrook, who ruled in favour of the political viewpoint and authorized the despatch of troops. The Commander-in-Chief had no option but to obey, and in compliance signalled Primrose that a brigade group was to be advanced to Girishk, but that it was on no account to cross the Helmand River; that the Khelat-i-Ghilzai garrison was to be kept at full strength; and that substantial reinforcements were being sent up the line.

Relying on these promised additions to his strength, Primrose decided to make the Girishk column as strong as he could. He based it on Brigadier-General Burrows's 1st Brigade of the 1st Division, Kandahar Field Force, which contained the 66th Regiment of Foot, the 1st Bombay Native Infantry (Grenadiers) and the 30th Bombay Native Infantry (Jacob's Rifles). He added under command Brigadier-General Nuttall's Cavalry Brigade which was composed of E Battery of B Brigade Royal Horse Artillery, the 3rd (Queen's Own) Bombay Light Cavalry and the 3rd Sind Horse. This made up a fighting strength of one thousand, eight hundred bayonets, five hundred and fifty sabres

and six 9-pounder muzzle-loading rifled guns – the same amount of infantry, but a hundred less cavalry and six fewer 9-pounders than had borne the brunt of Sher Jan's attack at Ahmad Khel. The Political Resident announced that he, too, would accompany the force.

Remaining in Kandahar would be the 7th Fusiliers and one wing of the 19th Bombay Native Infantry, eight hundred and fifty bayonets in all, with ten Royal Artillery guns or mortars. A small garrison to cope with planned insurrection, but commanded by Brigadier-General Brooke, who was worth a regiment in himself! Moreover, the promised reinforcements really were on the way, and the imminence of their arrival had been carefully leaked to the native population of the city. They were still strung out in small groups all along the lines of communication. Due to a shortage of supplies and of bullock-carts for baggage and replenishment, movement was restricted to half a regiment of native infantry or two companies of British infantry every other day along the twelve stages from Sibi to Quetta, the seven stages from Quetta to Chaman, and the remaining six to Kandahar. However, by the time that the Girishk column marched out a squadron of the Poona Horse (native cavalry) had arrived, which was as well since Primrose had given all his sowars to Burrows. The 4th Bombay Native Infantry, seven hundred strong, came in on 23 July followed, five days later, by Headquarters and three companies of the 28th Bombay Native Infantry, a further two hundred and fifty bayonets, more than doubling the original numbers.

More news was coming in about Ayub Khan's force, some of it rather disquieting. After all the bits and pieces had been collated and evaluated in accordance with the reliability of the source, current intelligence estimated that the Sirdar would have with him about six thousand regular infantry, a cavalry arm the size of which could not yet be assessed with any degree of accuracy, and thirty-six guns. The last item was interesting but not particularly alarming – Afghan artillery had been encountered in North Afghanistan, with the result that a gun park at Kabul was full of captured Afghan ordnance of all kinds. Government circles were not impressed. Besides, the political

line appears to have been that the Girishk column was going to operate in friendly country in concert with a loyal army. Primrose, on the other hand, was only too well aware that this did not reflect anything like the true situation, so had done his best to make the stipulated brigade group as strong as he could. So far as the manning of Kandahar was concerned, his appreciation was quite correct, and the acceptable risks that he took in temporarily reducing the garrison were completely justified by subsequent events.

The Government's reasons for forcing these decisions on him are not too difficult to understand. The whole war had originated from failure to support an Afghan amir against his enemies, with the result that he had soon given signs of changing alliances – and what one Afghan prince had done, another might also do. Wali Sher Ali Khan in their estimation was unlikely to behave differently; in any case, he would be defeated if left on his own, and this could not be allowed to happen through default by the British.

Sir Donald Stewart said later that Primrose should have sent the whole of his division to the Helmand, less a small garrison left in Kandahar Citadel, and gone with them himself. Maybe he was right, but Primrose himself did not have the option.

2

Brigadier-General Burrows's Girishk column set out from Kandahar on 4 July and covered the eighty miles to the Helmand River in a week, travelling an average of eight miles on a normal day but with twenty-mile stages on every third march. The country traversed was mostly flat and open, and the road was fairly good though there were occasional patches of heavy sand to be crossed. Supplies were adequate but water was often hard to come by as a result of the poor rainfall earlier in the year. Every march was hot and dusty, the temperature increasing with each mile along the gradual fifteen hundred foot descent from Kandahar to the river. The cavalry were the first to arrive, on

10 July, and the infantry brigade came up next day. They encamped on the east bank of the Helmand opposite the Wali's army, which had settled two miles away on the far side around Girishk fort.

St John's agents met him with reports that Ayub Khan had reached Farah, where he had dumped the families and belongings of his Kabuli and Kandahari adherents for the duration of hostilities, intending then onwards to travel light. This news, substantiating the previous rumours, had a disastrous effect on the Wali's men, and Sher Ali Khan came back across the river to see St John and tell him that his troops were on the verge of mutiny. He suggested on his own initiative that he should bring them back over to the east bank, and that they should then be disarmed by British soldiers. When Burrows was approached he agreed with the plan but decided that he would rather move to a more easily defensible camp before stirring up trouble. The Helmand was very much lower than usual and fordable at many more places than at the time of Biddulph's expedition, leaving the Girishk east bank position very vulnerable to attack. He selected a new location a few miles further north where the water was deeper, and set out on 14 July. Although it was only a short distance Burrows ordered that the move should be carried out under fully operational conditions, with the cavalry ready for instant action in case their services should be called for at short notice.

It was as well that he did so, for they were nearly at the new camp when the expected mutiny broke out. Sher Ali Khan was able to escape with most of his cavalry, who stayed loyal to him, and took refuge with St John. But the mutineers were left in possession of all his army's equipment and baggage, together with the stockpile of supplies that had been painfully (and forcibly) collected to sustain Burrows's force. They now moved northwards up the west bank towards Haidarabad, dragging the smooth-bore artillery with them.

Burrows ordered Nuttall and the Cavalry Brigade to set off in pursuit at once, but they were confronted by a part of the river which was much deeper than elsewhere, the very reason why the new site had been chosen. As a result, rather than waste

valuable time by retracing their steps they had to cross by an unusually intricate and dangerous ford where in some places there was only fording depth for horses wading in single file. The Royal Horse Artillery managed to find a slightly better ford but none the less had considerable difficulty in making the passage. Speed was imperative, there was no time to wait, so Colonel Malcolmson and the Sind Horse were ordered to push on ahead and stop the mutineers. The 3rd Light Cavalry, commanded by Major Currie as Colonel Stack was away on sick leave, had originally been detailed to escort E/B, the Royal Horse Artillery battery, but now every sabre was needed forward. Currie was ordered, therefore, to send each squadron forward independently as soon as they reached the west bank, rather than wait to form up as a regiment. Behind came the infantry, stepping out manfully after a wet crossing.

Malcolmson caught up with the mutineers six miles up-river, and forced the rearguard to stop and defend themselves. Unfortunately, he was again unable to charge home because of broken ground, as at Khushk-i-Nakhud. The enemy were able to disengage, but now elements of the 3rd Light Cavalry were coming up, and Nuttall began to press the mutineers so hard that they were compelled to abandon their flight and bring their guns into action. The two British cavalry regiments alone were in no position to take on six infantry regiments with artillery, so they now held back, poised ready to charge again if there was any sign of a move by the Wali's ex-army. As they withdrew, a sowar of the Sind Horse was thrown when his horse fell, and lay helpless on the ground right in the middle of the enemy shelling. He would have lost his life if Risaldar Dhokal Singh of the 3rd Light Cavalry had not galloped out and brought him in. The Risaldar had already received a decoration for bravery dating back to Mutiny days, when he saved the life of a young subaltern who would never have become a field-marshal if Dhokal Singh had not come to his aid. Lieutenant Evelyn Wood was hard beset by an enormous Pathan who turned instead on Dhokal Singh when he intervened and slashed at him with a mighty sword-stroke. Dhokal was able to twist and avoid it, but the blade went right through his saddle and into his horse's

spine. Then, before the Pathan could free his weapon Dhokal Singh clove his skull with an equally robust blow!

E/B had been further delayed on the west side of the river by cultivated ground which was criss-crossed with irrigation ditches, so deep that the guns could only be got over by digging ramps down one side and up the other, all of which took a lot of time. But at last Major Blackwood, the battery commander, got four of his guns clear and Nuttall ordered him into action at a range of eighteen hundred yards against the six hostile artillery pieces opposing him. This was at one o'clock, and soon afterwards the remaining two guns, the left division of the battery under Lieutenant Maclaine, had laboured forward across the ditches and come up to join him. Maclaine, an aggressive young officer, was extremely put out at having missed the beginning of the battle, so by way of consolation Blackwood allowed him to choose his own position on the left of the battery. Maclaine then expressed his individuality and asserted his ego by dropping his trails two hundred yards nearer to the enemy than the centre and right divisions!

An artillery duel ensued for about half an hour, and then the mutineer gunners decided that they had had enough and were seen to be running from their guns. Away with them went the drivers and horses, the riders only waiting to cut and destroy any harness that they did not take with them. Nuttall was waiting for this, and he had the 3rd Light Cavalry ready. Currie had moved his regiment to dead ground which provided some protection from the Afghan gun-fire, but was spotted by his brigadier-general, who decided that this refuge was too far away from the forming-up point for the task that he had in mind for the regiment. So Currie and his men were ordered back into the open, just in time to receive a salvo of round shot, much to the major's indignation! But now he was in the right place to charge the guns, and he knew all about that sort of operation. Cornet Currie and Lieutenant Evelyn Wood had together charged and captured some guns during the Mutiny, but had been compelled to gallop away for their lives to escape from a furious counter-charge. Currie managed to keep just two feet ahead of the lance-point of a fine, bearded mutineer sowar until he took

refuge among the 17th Lancers! He got his orders, and off went the 3rd Light Cavalry to over-run the smooth-bore battery position. And there they stayed, for they had been forbidden to pursue further.

Now at last the British infantry appeared on the scene and E/B moved further forward to support their attack on the mutineer infantry lines. The 66th Foot were the leading regiment and went into attack almost from the line of march. Lieutenant Faunce and Second-Lieutenant Barr with half a company scrambled over a deep water-channel and stormed their way into a walled garden where they shot or bayoneted the defenders. Soon the mutineer infantry were in full retreat, defeated but able to fight another day. The greater part marched north to meet and join Ayub Khan. Sixty of their dead lay on the field of battle.

This small but successful engagement was the first in which many of the men in the Girishk column had taken part, and on the whole they had acquitted themselves well. But it also showed that there was a lot of raw material which had not yet been moulded into shape. When, for example, Jacob's Rifles came forward to man the rising ground overlooking the country across which their enemy, now quite some distance out of range, were making their escape, they were unable to resist a wild, irregular and futile fusillade without orders, many of the men firing up into the air, and some of them not even putting their rifles to their shoulders. This was observed and recorded by Captain Harris of the 66th Foot, Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General of the infantry brigade, who felt some concern. Apart from indiscipline, it seemed to him that the men did not have sufficient experience with their arms, and in some cases did not know how to use them. Perhaps recruit training had been rather perfunctory, or even completely lacking during the long journey up from the Bombay Presidency.

The captured guns now had to be retrieved and brought back to camp, but there were no horses left from the original gun-teams, and the wheel harness which was designed to hold up the shafts of the limbers had been slashed and rendered useless. The problem was overcome by using infantrymen to hold up

the poles, just to keep them off the ground, while the hard work of traction was performed by lead horses, the front pairs of E/B's gun teams, who were hooked in to pull.

These guns and howitzers were a valuable acquisition, doubling the number of pieces in the brigade group's artillery. Plenty of ammunition was captured with them, more than compensating for the fifteen common and sixty-eight shrapnel shell expended by E/B during the battle. Burrows determined to form a smooth-bore battery of his own out of this material, but he wanted to get back and establish his new camp before dark, and was in a hurry to move. He decided that it was not possible to take everything, and ordered that some of the ammunition wagons should be burned, and that all the ammunition except for fifty-two rounds per gun for each of the six pieces should be thrown into a deep hole in the river. This almost incredible decision was made by a commander who knew that there were no more shells for these guns nearer than Kandahar, and possibly none for the howitzers closer than India. No thought appears to have been given to making some use of the fifty camels captured at the same time, nor of loading the infantry with one round a man. The decision was to be regretted most deeply, and only too soon.

3

Having come out from Kandahar to support the Wali's army, and instead been obliged to attack it, disperse it and give sanctuary to its owner, Burrows now had no firm directive. All that he knew for certain was that he could not stay at Girishk, as the mutineers had made off with the stock of local supplies laid in for his brigades, and no more were likely to be forthcoming. Ayub Khan was now reported to be only three marches away, his army weary after nearly two hundred and fifty miles of dust, sand and heat, his advance channelled into a single arid road ending in an area already denuded of provisions. But Burrows was specifically forbidden to cross the Helmand and attack the enemy column, strung out as it would inevitably have been at

the wrong end of a long line of communications, even though Biddulph had reconnoitred the ground and made his report. So he called a council of war to find out what everybody else thought, only to discover that opinions were divided. St John wanted to go north to Haidarabad where local produce was said to be available, to occupy the forts there before Ayub Khan's arrival; for once he did not see eye to eye with Sher Ali Khan, who thought that he would like to go all the way back to Kandahar. Colonel Malcolmson and Lieutenant-Colonel Anderson of the Bombay Grenadiers also advocated a complete withdrawal.

Faced with the need for a decision, Burrows decided on principle not to split his force; and against taking the column to Haidarabad, because that course would permit Ayub Khan, if his supply position would allow it, to carry on along the strategic highway by the direct road to Kandahar, closer to the city than Burrows would be at Haidarabad. At the same time, he saw no reason for withdrawing all the way to the capital at this stage, so he would compromise and shorten his own supply lines by retracing his steps to the Khushk-i-Nakhud River and stay there to await orders, and to hope that the situation would clarify itself. He felt quite justified in taking this course, as Biddulph had already suggested that if the Helmand River line could not be held against an advance from Herat, then the next natural defence area lay between Khushk-i-Nakhud and Karez-i-Ata. So the Sirdar was to be allowed an unopposed river-crossing, and plenty of time to concentrate his troops and transport, to rest them and then at his leisure to decide upon which of the several courses of action now open to him should be adopted.

As it was the hottest time of the year, and Burrows had to traverse one of the hottest parts of a country notorious for the intensity of its heat in summer, he moved back on the evening of 15 July, making a forced march of twenty-six miles through such coolness as the night provided, to one of his previous camps at Mis-Karez. This spoke well for the fitness of the troops, but the extra few miles had a disproportionately bad effect on the locally recruited transport animals. Arriving next morning, they

stayed the day, and on the 17th moved on an easy eight miles to Pirzada, on the Kandahar side of the Khushk-i-Nakhud River, where there was plenty of water. The river itself was almost completely dry. Next day, St John and Major Leach, VC, rode off to Maiwand with a squadron of cavalry and arranged for a supply of flour from the mills that they found to be there.

On 19 July Burrows changed his mind again and returned three miles back towards Girishk to an open camp beyond the west bank of the Khushk-i-Nakhud. Also on that day the smooth-bore battery came into official existence. The brigadier-general gave up his orderly officer, Captain Slade, of the Royal Horse Artillery, to command it; Lieutenant Jones, Royal Artillery, was co-opted from his post of Transport Officer in the Cavalry Brigade, and Lieutenant Fowle, Royal Artillery, was detailed from the Ordnance Park of 5-11 Heavy Battery. E/B produced fourteen gunners and drivers, and fourteen horses, while another two dozen horses were variously procured from the Wali, and from C-2 Battery in Kandahar. But the main complement of personnel to serve the guns came from the 66th Foot, who provided Lieutenant Faunce and forty-two infantrymen.

Two days later, reliable information was obtained that Ayub Khan's main body had reached the Helmand on or about the 20th and that he had diverted his artillery and infantry to Haidarabad, where they had been distributed among the villages to rest and recuperate; while a large force of cavalry under the Lui-Naib (literally Great Leader) Khush-Dil Khan was believed to have arrived some days before. Fearing a night attack by these horsemen, Burrows now shifted his camp yet again a few hundred yards to a walled enclosure, into which he concentrated his one hundred and thirty sick, the stores and the baggage animals.

4

General Primrose in Kandahar now received a directive from the Commander-in-Chief, which he passed on to Burrows; it read as follows:

‘You will understand that you have full liberty to attack Ayub, if you consider you are strong enough to do so. Government consider it of the greatest political importance that his force should be dispersed, and prevented by all possible means from passing on to Ghazni.’

According to his narrative written after the battle of Maiwand, Burrows interpreted this, not as a matter of choice and discretion, but as a definite order to strike a blow at the Sirdar.

With a firm directive, or what he was obliged to interpret as such, the onus was now laid on Burrows to assess Ayub Khan’s intentions and to anticipate his movements. He claimed later that he found it impossible to obtain any reliable intelligence, so it may be of interest to examine how he was equipped for doing so.

His chief intelligence adviser, in independent political charge though he might have been, was St John, once an officer of the Royal Engineers, but with not very much military experience. He was scoffed at by some military officers for having once been Principal of a native high school in the Bombay Presidency, but even this must have given him more insight into Asiatic mental processes than the ordinary regimental officer would have been likely to possess.

On a lower level, Mr Griesbach, of the Survey of India, was attached to Nuttall’s staff, and was making himself valuable by accompanying patrols, interviewing locals and generally assisting the military.

Among Burrows’s army staff was Major Leach, also employed on survey, and now recovered from the wound that he had received in his brush with the Shinwari villagers. He had been out surveying the area from Girishk to Maiwand in June, so possessed a knowledge of the topography second to none. A first-class soldier, it is obvious from his narrative that he was keenly interested in intelligence, so would have been an excellent complement to St John, with whom his relations appear to have been most cordial. He was also full of praise for Mr Griesbach. These three officers would have been able to process and evaluate information once it had been obtained. But intelligence is

never just there, it has to be sought, collection must be planned, and sometimes it may have to be obtained by fighting.

Basic intelligence on Herat, Ayub Khan and his approach route would have been in St John's files, stemming originally from police reports and forwarded by Simla. Current political intelligence on the northern part of Afghanistan would have been sent by telegraph from Kabul to Simla for processing and dissemination to Kandahar through governmental and military channels. And in Kandahar Sir Donald Stewart in early days had supplemented St John's political intelligence staff with a small army cell headed by Captain Gaselee, to make sure that purely military information was properly processed and not overlooked. Unfortunately, the General took Gaselee with him to Kabul, and there is no record of him being replaced.

Leach's maps were available at a scale of one quarter of an inch to the mile, perfectly adequate for roads, rivers, hills and villages, but not designed to cover minor tactical features. Problems of space and time could be resolved, but regimental battle positions could not be selected.

St John had established his own network of intelligence agents, or spies in the parlance of the time, over a period of two years, and he appears to have chosen well, as their reports were as reliable as could be expected. He also had available to him any information obtained by Wali Sher Ali Khan's sources, but neither this material nor its interpretation by the Wali's entourage could be accepted as being in any way trustworthy, considering the vested interests involved. In particular, anything received from the Wali after most of his army had defected would have been useless.

Local authorities constituted another source, but information given was inevitably biased, liable to be distorted, and possibly deliberately misleading. The occasional accurate report was likely to be submerged in a sea of rubbish.

So plenty of information was coming in, and a competent staff existed to process it. But it was not timely. An accurate picture was being built up only as the situation had been three days earlier, which was all very well while Ayub Khan was miles away across the Farah desert, but not now that he was in leaping

distance of his post-Helmand objectives. The problem was that all messages had to travel by horsed courier through a territory where nobody minded his own business and any show of urgency might have to be explained. Sporadic transits would normally succeed in reaching their destinations but any routine delivery would have aroused suspicion and become liable to interception unless under strong escort – which would not have been popular with the troops in the hot weather. The telegraph had come up from Quetta to Kandahar, subject to frequent cutting by the local population in need of wire, but there was none from Kandahar to the west. The heliograph, though still in its infancy, was available in Kandahar and Biddulph had taken some instruments to the Helmand in the previous year, but there is no record of the Girishk column having any with them. If some were held, their proper exploitation might have been invaluable. There would have been no practical difficulties, as was proved next year, when a British brigade stationed at Maiwand successfully maintained continuous heliographic communication with Kandahar, using an intermediate station on the top of the pass.

The remaining method of procuring information was by means of cavalry patrols, but Burrows was facing a situation where the unsettled state of the country made it impossible to send out single horsemen, or even small groups. The minimum safe strength of a patrol had to be a troop of cavalry, whose range and speed were limited. Although contemporary doctrine claimed that single horsemen with a thorough knowledge of the work, and with mounts in perfect condition, might be able to travel forty to fifty miles a day at the rate of twelve or fourteen miles in the hour and continue to do so for several days, it was ruled that this could not be expected of a body of horsemen; a normal cavalry patrol was supposed to keep up a rate for any ordinary distance of only six miles an hour.

Burrows was not in patrol contact with Ayub Khan at Haidarabad. He had decided that he could not maintain troops there, and that they would in any case have been driven away, or cut off and massacred by the Lui-Naib's cavalry. But he was sending out daily reconnaissance parties south-west to the Arghandab, west to Mis-Karez, to Sangbur fourteen miles to the

north-west and to Maiwand eleven miles to the north. Unfortunately, the system on which these patrols were conducted was faulty. No permanent outposts were manned; the daily patrols, instead of relieving each other, returned to camp; the same roads were followed, the same times were observed. The routine became easily predictable, patrols could be avoided and secrets kept; during the hours that elapsed between the departure of one troop and the arrival of another the enemy were free to move in any direction. And as the attitude of the area generally was hostile, whereas any movements by Burrows were immediately reported to Ayub Khan, little or no information about the Sirdar was brought into the British camp. Major Leach was aware of the inadequacy of these arrangements but he was not able to introduce any changes.

5

Looking at the situation from Ayub Khan's point of view, we do not know what plans he had made for his arrival on the Helmand River. While still three or four marches out in the desert he would have been met by the representatives of the mutineers, anxious to be the first to offer their allegiance and curry favour. They would have told him that there was nothing left in the way of supplies at Girishk, but they had captured the dumps and taken them north to Haidarabad. Next he was probably pleasantly surprised and relieved to hear that the British had withdrawn back along the Kandahar road. His troops had made a long march over a hard route from Farah and needed time before they could be brought up to full fighting trim. He wanted in any case to stay for a short while on the Helmand to allow the Zamindawar and other tribesmen to make up their minds and then concentrate in accordance with his instructions. It would be quite unnecessary, for example, for the Khakrez clans from the north-east to go to all the trouble of joining him on the river, when they could just as well wait for him at Maiwand, where they could be usefully employed exerting pressure on the fort's commandant to organize supplies. Girishk

now had nothing for him, he could go south or north along the river-bank. Kalabist in the south had nothing to recommend it as far as his future advance was concerned so he went up to Haidarabad to settle his weary army among the forts and villages. Khush-Dil Khan, the Lui-Naib, had already been resting there for several days, so Ayub Khan now ordered him forward to reconnoitre the British, check reports of their strength and pave the way for the main body. Although he was operating in friendly territory with every worthy citizen on his side, and so in continuous receipt of news about the Girishk column, he wanted to make absolutely sure that Burrows really was still at Khushk-i-Nakhud, and to find out if there had been any new developments.

It must be assumed that he was now fully committed to fight the British and to capture Kandahar. Any avoidance of either course would have resulted in irretrievable loss of prestige, and his following might even have turned against such a leader; but he still had several choices of action left open to him for implementing these aims. He could advance to Sangbur, which was already held by his ghazis, and thence on to the Khushk-i-Nakhud village complex to attack his small but prepared opponent in a semi-defensive position, after a fourteen-mile approach over a desert track which was now nearly waterless, as the two streams crossing it had almost completely dried up. Or he could go to Maiwand by one of two routes, either through Malmand and over the mountain pass south-east of it, or again by way of Sangbur which could constitute a firm base for his operations. The Malmand route was longer, and the British would therefore be more likely to hear of his move and deduce his intention. There would be an additional advantage in going to Sangbur, as the ghazis there could chase away any of Burrows's patrols and deny them information – they might not even get close enough to see that the garrison had been reinforced! If they did manage to find out, Burrows would still not know for sure whether he was intending to attack at Khushk-i-Nakhud, or meant to pass by and occupy Maiwand.

The Maiwand flour-mills would have plenty of food waiting for him, his ghazis from Khakrez would have been given access

to the fort to await his arrival, and he could get there without fighting – unless the British moved to intercept him. Then, once established in a well-watered area he could decide whether to head straight over the Maiwand Pass to Kandahar and sever the British lines of communication at Sinjiri, or move south in his own time to destroy them in the field at Khushk-i-Nakhud. If, however, Burrows should march to anticipate him in Maiwand, he would admittedly have an open route to Kandahar through a now clear Khushk-i-Nakhud; but Burrows would be closer to the British base, and he might have to face the combined strength of column and garrison either on the Arghandab at Sinjiri, or behind the city walls. It was, therefore, very much to his advantage to seize Maiwand with a strong force before his adversary got there; and to do so, the Sangbur route would be the quickest, the most secure, and the least likely to be detected.

6

The Commander-in-Chief's signal was specifically a directive – it did not contain any firm orders phrased as such. Moreover, it was to Primrose, not to Burrows. There is some doubt whether Primrose told his Girishk column commander that part of the message which read 'if you consider you are strong enough to do so' in respect of conferring 'full liberty to attack Ayub'. That at least, if true, would have given Burrows a little less to think about. However, the responsibility for ensuring that the Sirdar and his army did not get through to Ghazni had been passed down all along the chain of command to the brigadier-general on the spot and there it had to stay – irrespective of councils of war held in Column Headquarters. Nobody had said anything about Kandahar, which was presumably supposed to look after itself – another worry the less for Burrows to consider.

If he remained at Khushk-i-Nakhud, Ayub Khan would have a clear way to Maiwand and thence to Ghazni either by the Khakrez Valley or over the pass to Kandahar and then on to the north – though in the latter event there would still be the Kandahar garrison to try and stop him. If, on the other hand,

he were to forestall the Sirdar in Maiwand he would block both these tracks, and might still have time to march over the pass and stop him at the Arghandab if he went for Kandahar through Khushk-i-Nakhud – although long, fast marches were not the British strong point, as he had found on the way back from Girishk.

He did hold a council of war, but it was of little assistance. Most of the cavalry brigade wanted to retire on Kandahar, which was out of the question. St John and his staff wanted him to stay and fight. So he postponed the evil day for making a decision, hoping that with time Ayub Khan's aim would become clearer.

His column's baggage had already during the Girishk operations proved to be a serious encumbrance. No attempt had been made to limit the amount to accompany the force when it left Kandahar, as nobody had any idea how long it was going to remain out in the field. Therefore, in addition to all the ordnance stores and ammunition necessary for a protracted campaign, the commissariat had been augmented to include extra amenities for alleviating the hardship of the climate, the heat and the sun. Officers had not been limited in the matter of personal kit and camp equipment, the brigadier-general's share alone being of a size and importance to warrant a guard on the march of thirteen men from Jacob's Rifles, including as it did everything from tents to soda-water.

The result had been an enormous convoy of well over three thousand transport animals, ammunition ponies, mules, donkeys, bullocks and hundreds of camels. There might have been elephants, too, if Sir Donald Stewart had not taken them with him to Kabul. Inseparable from the transport was its concomitant mass of drivers, many of them locally enlisted Kandaharis with their own beasts, some of which were debilitated by their march to the Helmand and back. In addition to these, there were great numbers of other followers (non-combatants) such as cooks, water-carriers, sweepers, tailors, doolie and stretcher-bearers, and officers' private servants, almost as many again as the whole fighting element. For example, the Royal Horse Artillery battery with a rank and file strength of one hundred and

forty-six combatants carried three hundred and nineteen followers on its backs, mostly grass-cutters to provide the horses with forage. All these men and beasts had to accompany the column wherever it went, as in the rapaciously hostile state of the country there was no place where anything could be left in safety without a strong guard – and Burrows's force was already too small to allow large detachments to be set aside for this sort of duty.

After Girishk, when the transport and follower millstone had made its weight felt to an unacceptable degree, orders had been issued to cut down tents and followers to the lowest possible scale, and Burrows intended to send a return convoy to Kandahar as soon as arrangements could be made. Captain Heath, now recovered from an illness and returning to resume his appointment as brigade-major to Burrows, had brought a commissariat convoy from Kandahar in on the 20th; but even though it had been escorted by a hundred and thirty men from Jacob's Rifles, it had been threatened by large hostile bodies of villagers from along the route. Burrows did not feel like entrusting his sick, and his superfluous stores and followers, to so small a guard, but was reluctant to spare more men. So he retained the lot pending the arrival of a second provision convoy which was to be escorted up by two companies of the 4th Bombay Infantry. He meant then to send the return convoy to Kandahar escorted by the two guard-parties combined. This second convoy, however, had not yet arrived – it had not even set out on its journey.

7

The Lui-Naib was closer than expected and had his first brush with the Girishk column on 23 July. It was known that something was happening, as on the previous evening St John had heard that some enemy cavalry were liable to be patrolling in the vicinity of Maiwand, arranging supplies for the Afghan army. So it was arranged that Leach should go there next day with an escort of the 3rd Light Cavalry and burn the stacks of grain

that were standing in the fields, rather than that they should fall into hostile hands.

Before his departure the routine Sangbur patrol consisting of forty sabres of the Sind Horse under Lieutenant A. M. Monteith left camp. It was then four o'clock in the morning – an hour before first light. When they were three miles out they contacted a much larger body of enemy cavalry, so withdrew for a short distance to a piece of ground which could easily be defended, where Monteith dismounted his sowars and held the Afghan horse in check with carbine fire.

Leach had left camp on his own mission half an hour after the patrol had departed and heard shots just as day was breaking. He halted his escort, and rode over to see what was happening. On reaching Monteith he found him facing five hundred of the Lui-Naib's horsemen. He knew that the force in camp would be standing to arms at this very time, as a precaution against the ever-possible threat of dawn attack, and this meant that the cavalry would be saddled and the guns horsed – the teams hooked in to the limbers. He therefore galloped back at once and gave his news to Burrows, who lost no time in sending out Nuttall and the rest of his cavalry brigade, supported by Maclaine's division of two guns from E/B.

Nuttall was about to close with the enemy when his forward scouts reported that the Afghan horsemen were backed up in rear by two regiments of infantry. This information should not have made the slightest difference. If true, the British cavalry would have drawn rein before coming under infantry volleys, and fanned out to find the enemy's strength and dispositions. In this case it was a completely false report, but caused Nuttall to hold back awaiting further orders or reinforcements. As a result the enemy was able to make a rapid, orderly, unmolested withdrawal over nearly eight miles of unbroken plain ideal for cavalry action to the old fort of Sangbur and its garrison of ghazis.

This was another disappointment for Maclaine. His guns had once more lost their chance through what he would have considered to be quite unnecessary caution over a false alarm. He may have felt that he had been denied his opportunity for individual action through slow reactions on the part of his

superiors, and promised himself to do much better if he was ever given the freedom to act on his own.

By the time the affair was over it was no longer possible to complete the corn-burning expedition, which was abandoned.

The next day passed quietly, but on the 25th the advance party of the Sangbur patrol, still pursuing a route hallowed by routine, was ambushed by horsemen who burst out of a ravine where they had lain concealed, and forced to run for it. Although they had a good start, two sowars of the Sind Horse were overtaken by better-mounted riders and cut down before they could rejoin the rest of the patrol.

On the same day Lieutenant Smith of the Sind Horse took a hundred sabres to Maiwand to see if he could find out anything about the whereabouts and intentions of the enemy. When he reached Mashak, a village seven miles from Maiwand, he talked with a local villager who told him that the Lui-Naib's patrols were at Garmao, where supplies were being collected for Ayub Khan's main body. The army itself was expected at Sangbur next day, the 26th, and at Maiwand on the day after. Smith sent this information back to Burrows at once, and went on to Maiwand Fort where he questioned the Naib, the Commandant, who confirmed it. On his return to camp, Smith gave his verbal report to a council of war summoned to hear him, but Burrows declined to take action on this intelligence alone, preferring to wait for corroboration from St John's agents. However, Smith was sent on patrol to Sangbur next morning to see if Ayub Khan was in fact there, as his informants had claimed he would be. He reported on his return that he had seen three hundred cavalry, but that the main body had not arrived.

The same evening some of the Wali's entourage who had gone to visit Maiwand reported that a party of ghazis two hundred to three hundred strong had now occupied the mud fort, and that Garmao, six miles to the west, was held in force by enemy cavalry. Earlier in the day the Malmand Pass had been said to be clear.

St John and Leach had now deduced quite correctly that Ayub Khan intended to make for Maiwand – but where was he now, on the evening of 26 July? His cavalry were at Garmao and

Sangbur, but where was the main body? Not crossing the Malmand Pass, or the Wali's men would have seen them; not at Garmao, or Smith's patrol would have seen them setting out. Smith said that they were not at Sangbur. His routine patrol had left camp in accordance with normal custom at four o'clock in the morning, in the dark, and would have taken about two and a half hours to cover the fourteen-mile journey to Sangbur. Once there, he would have had no great temptation to linger, as a similar patrol from the same regiment had got into trouble on the previous day, while the observed presence of three hundred Afghan horsemen would have militated against a leisurely and detailed reconnaissance from close range. So Smith returned to camp, arriving at about ten o'clock, and reported.

In fact, all that he was saying was that at about eight o'clock in the morning he had not seen Ayub Khan's main army, and even this should have been considered in the light of his having had very little chance of so doing. If deception measures had been taken by the Afghans, which could easily have happened as they knew when and where to expect the patrol, Ayub Khan could have been encamped in some of the folds of the rolling wilderness out of sight to the west of the village, possibly even ready to march again. Or he could have set out from Haidarabad by night and be on the point of arrival – Burrows himself had left the Helmand in the lesser heat of darkness, travelling by moonlight. Even if the Sirdar had advanced that very morning, as the Mashak villager and the Maiwand Naib had said that he would do, and had made no attempt to conceal his movements, he would not have reached Sangbur until the afternoon and his presence would not have been detected before the arrival of the next morning's patrol. By which time he might have been on the move again.

To catch Ayub Khan at the end of his thirteen-mile march from the Helmand, both first and last light information would have been essential. A patrol would not have been able to stay out all day without being seen and chased away; but they could have been sent out morning and evening, sufficiently strong to fight for information if necessary. Once it had been established for sure that the main Afghan force of infantry was really begin-

ning to come in, emergency couriers could have got the news to Burrows within the hour, and he should have had roughly nine hours in hand before Ayub Khan moved again.

This would have put some strain on the cavalry and upon the three junior British officers in each regiment, and it was an almost unbelievably hot and unpleasant time of the year. But they were not mounted on 'half-starved, overworked beasts', as claimed in some narratives, which was proved by their performance during the next few days. The job could have been done. Under the circumstances obtaining at the time, when it should have been obvious to all that an enemy initiative was imminent, it is incredible that a more robust patrol plan had not been implemented. Even as late as the evening of the 26th, St John and the staff either did not realize that Ayub Khan was not necessarily still in the neighbourhood of Haidarabad; or they had failed to get the point through to Burrows – and it is no use producing the right answer if you cannot convince the person who should take action upon it.

Ayub Khan was not at Haidarabad. Earlier in the afternoon sentries on the watchtowers of Sangbur would have seen the first few black dots playing in the mirage, leaping and falling, doubling their height then shrinking to nothing, soon to show themselves as forward scouts of Ayub Khan's advance guard. Then their parent squadrons trailing long, low plumes of dust in the still, baking air of Afghanistan's heat. After them came the regular infantry trudging mindlessly but purposefully through the murk, breathing patiently through the cloth rags wound around their mouths and noses, company following company, regiment in the train of regiment, thousand after thousand.

From later assessments, it is believed that Ayub Khan had with him four regiments of Herati infantry and five more of Kabulis, all armed with British Enfield rifles; also a regiment of Kandaharis and the Wali's mutineers, a total of something like seven thousand foot-soldiers. His cavalry, most of whom were ahead at Garmao with the Lui-Naib, were three regiments of Kabuli regulars adding up to one thousand sowars, and three thousand Jamshidi and Feroz-Kohi irregular horse from the hill-country around Herat.

His cause was a popular one (though villagers on his line of march still prudently vacated their homes until he had passed) and the British had expected that the appearance of the Herat army would be followed by an uprising; but the scale of insurrection had been grossly underestimated. He had attracted a vast horde of tribesmen on horse and on foot, ghazi and peasant, young and old, every man capable of bearing arms from the fine, fighting clans of the Zamindawar, from Farah in the west to Chaman in the east, and even from the city of Kandahar itself – all had flocked to his standard. Standing by to welcome him in Maiwand were the men from Khakrez and the north. Estimates of numbers vary from the possible to the fantastic, but there may have been fifteen to twenty thousand tribesmen, making a total force of twenty-five to thirty thousand armed men.

Predictions of Ayub Khan's artillery strength had been accurate, but he had left six guns in Farah, bringing with him thirty pieces of different calibres – mostly 6-pounders but including three of the modern 14-pounder Armstrong guns, heavier metal than anything possessed by Burrows.

He was heading for Maiwand, and from there he meant to make a forced twenty-six-mile march to Sinjiri, hoping to cut off Burrows from his base.

CHAPTER 6

Advance to Contact

1

GIVEN A LITTLE licence, one can draw on personal experience to expand the known facts and describe camp routine in Khushki-Nakhud as the afternoon of 26 July drew to a close.

The transport animals were driven in from their grazing grounds and tethered to picket lines or shackled by the heels inside the mud-brick enclosure for the night. The cavalry and artillery horses had been filed out to water and were being given their last feed of the day. Men off duty were strolling slowly back to their lines, dhobis were collecting the clothes that they had washed and put out to dry. The soldiery had finished their evening meals, and the native troops would not expect anything more, other than tea, until after the three or four hours of morning parade, held before the heat of the day became too great. The 66th Foot, on the other hand, would have some form of breakfast and a heavier meal at noon. Haversack rations for patrols had been prepared and the cooks had put out their fires. They used the rough sand to scour their utensils before putting them away for the night.

Soon the sun vented its last waning glare of golden spite over the camp and armed men began to collect inside the perimeter in readiness for the evening precaution of stand-to-arms. Then the 66th fell in behind the shelter trench that they had dug to their front while the remaining infantry took post behind ramparts of kit-bags and camel-saddles. In the angles of the walls the guns were manned and laid on possible enemy lines of approach. Officers, bathed and in clean uniforms, joined their men, a bugle sounded, and the camp fell silent, riflemen and gunners peering out into the gathering dusk.

Darkness came quickly, but the moon would be up by eight o'clock. On the signal for an end to the alert the men dispersed to their bivouacs except for sentries, who stayed at their posts, eyes straining through the gloom. Lights appeared in the officers' mess tents where they sat down to their dinner, risking the remote chance of a rifle bullet from a sniper in the outer darkness rather than swelter with closed flaps around their hot oil lamps or candles. After a while these, too, dimmed and the column slept.

But there was still light in the brigadier-general's conference tent. The Wali's news of ghazis in Maiwand had seriously alarmed St John, and he was making great efforts to persuade Burrows to move there without delay, pointing out that he must seize the opportunity to evict this comparatively small body of tribesmen from the fort before Ayub Khan arrived and received it from their hands. The column commander was most reluctant to budge, and eventually St John came out of the tent to tell Leach that it was no good, Burrows was quite determined not to go. But the Resident marshalled his facts once more, went in again and kept on at the brigadier-general until at last he conceded the need for action. St John and Leach wanted to set off at once, that very night, but on this point Burrows was adamant. He would not move out until morning. He considered that by doing this he would still anticipate Ayub's army by at least a day, thinking him to be at Haidarabad, thirty miles away. He summoned his commanding officers, most of whom were already asleep in bed, to a conference at half-past ten at night, and issued his orders for breaking camp and advancing to attack Maiwand next morning.

Within an hour chains of subsidiary orders had spread through the camp and there was no more sleep for the men. The first general nuisance was caused by the camel-drivers retrieving their saddles from the perimeter defences and carrying them off to put on their animals. By one o'clock in the morning a party detailed by Jacob's Rifles came to load the brigade stores. But these were so securely tucked away in little brick enclosures, and it was such a slow business extricating them through the little narrow doorways, that the sappers had to be called in to speed things

up by breaking down the walls. By rouse, or reveille, which was at four o'clock – one hour earlier than usual – most of the men had been on duty for some time, working hard in the dark, sticky heat, for each regiment had its own baggage to load as well as its share of the brigade equipment. But despite early waking, something had gone wrong with the feeding arrangements for the native infantry. The basis of their diet was the chupatti, an unleavened pancake, and the process of cooking them was laborious and time-consuming – the Grenadiers alone would have expected to eat something like two thousand of them for the morning meal. This meant that the cooks would have had to start work preparing them at two o'clock in the morning – which in itself should have presented no great difficulty. Possibly they expected to scavenge for fuel after the morning stand-to, which would still have given them time to prepare the routine meal for ten o'clock. One suspects, however, that fuel and rations for native personnel were normally given out in the morning, to avoid that mysterious wastage so liable to occur at night in a camp full of hungry followers, and that a formidable commissariat staff was now packing them up and refusing to issue any. British officers were probably told nothing about the situation until they noticed the woebegone faces of their men on parade, when it was too late to do anything to put matters right. As a result, many of the sepoys, after a hot, dirty and fatiguing night were to face a march and a battle with empty stomachs. What was more, as no one was permitted to leave camp after the perimeter had been sealed in the evening, and the water-point was outside, some of the men, certainly Jacob's Rifles, left camp thirsty so that the regimental quartermaster could march out with his quota of full water-containers intact.

Officers of British units made no complaints in their reports about the condition in which their men left camp, so better arrangements must have been made. It was the same in the case of the cavalry, whose quartermasters were accustomed to early patrols departing daily before first light. The gunners had no trouble – they had learned their lesson at Girishk. Major Blackwood wrote after the skirmish with the mutineers that thirst was

a 'caution'. It is surprising that this short, stocky, black-moustached veteran of the Indian Mutiny and the Lushai campaign should have been caught even once in this way, and it is reasonable to suppose that he took prompt steps to make sure that his battery was not taken by surprise again by a sudden change of plan.

2

On 27 July, still celebrated as Maiwand Day, two squadrons of native cavalry moved out from Khushk-i-Nakhud Camp before first light. Lieutenant A. M. Monteith of the 3rd Sind Horse with fifty sabres went to take up position on some higher ground three miles to the north from which on a clear day it was possible to see for a long distance along the approaches from Sangbur and Maiwand. At the same time Lieutenant Geoghegan, who had just joined the 3rd Light Cavalry, posted a line of ten double-sentry vedettes stretching three miles across the valley of the Khushk-i-Nakhud to provide warning of enemy attack and protection while the baggage was being loaded. He held the remainder of his fifty sabres in central reserve north of the camp.

Meanwhile the infantry had to reorganize to provide their quota to guard the immense mass of impedimenta and its transport. Major Ready, a senior officer from the 66th Foot, was appointed to be in charge of the escort, and each infantry regiment detached a company to be under his orders. But in addition to these men, there were many other details. The Grenadiers had to find fifty men to guard the ordnance stores and a further twenty-five for the Treasury and Brigadier-General Burrows's personal baggage. Jacob's Rifles provided forty men for the commissariat. As a result the Grenadiers lost nearly a quarter of their strength, seriously weakening their fighting echelon. Jacob's Rifles were in an even worse state, as the regiment contained a greater proportion of recent recruits, some of whom had come up with the recent supply convoy from Kandahar, and had not yet been allotted to companies. So, on the battle morning, the



1 The Afghan salient, showing, on the left, the gun position from which they engaged the British line at a range of less than 300 yards.



2 The last garden in Khig, from the area of the last eleven's final stand. The battlefield is in the middle distance.



3 Taken from the left of the 66th Foot's position in the line of battle. Khig is on the left, and Mundabad on the right. The hills on the right end near Pirzada and Khushk-i-Nakhud. The fold in the ground occupied by the 66th is in the foreground, in line with the left end of Mundabad.



4 The Afghan war cemetery at Maiwand.



5 Looking across the graves to the ruins of Maiwand fort and village.

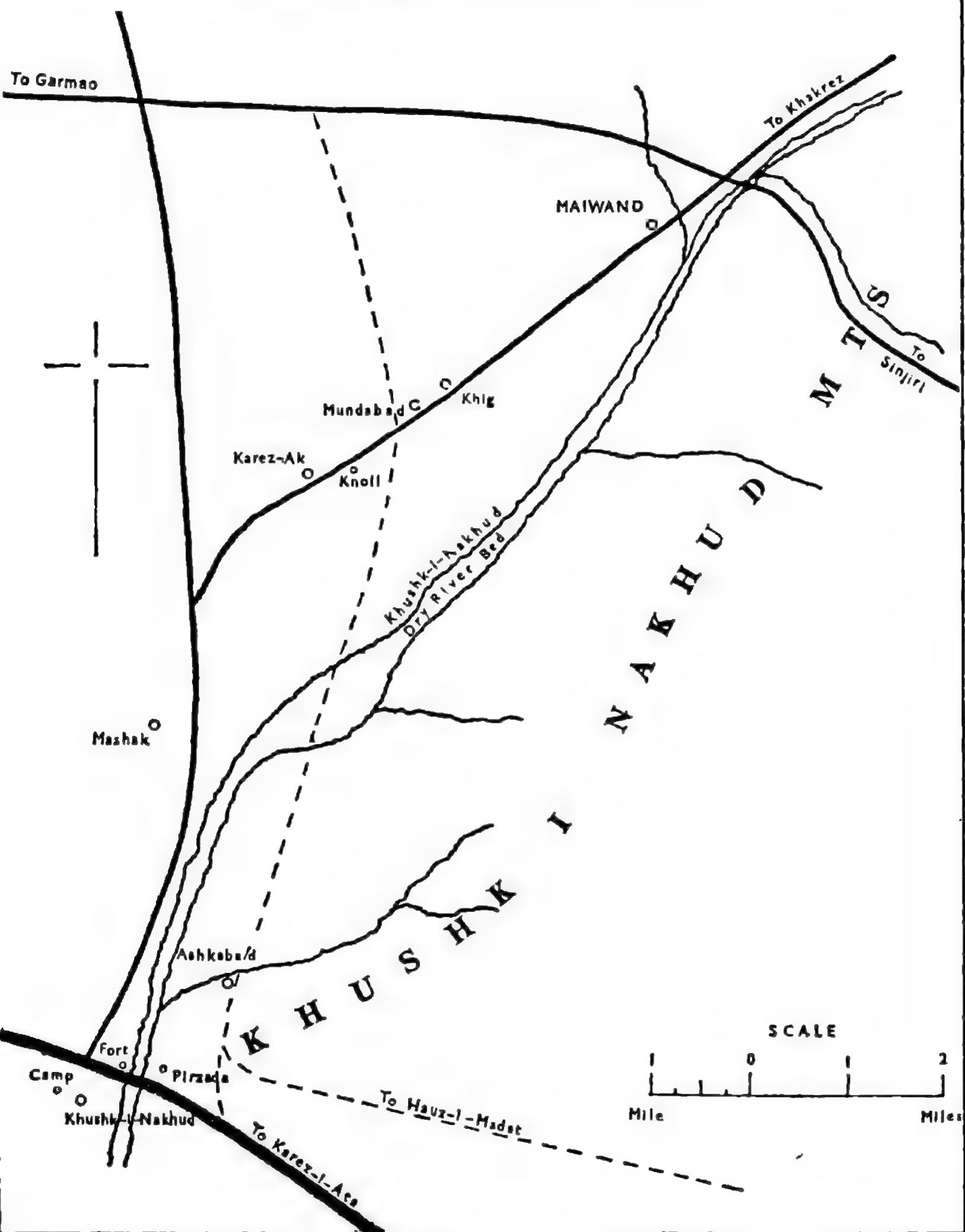


6 'Saving the Guns.'

regiment's fighting echelon was told off into eight companies of fifty men each. The recruits who had never yet fired their weapons were assigned to the duty, in the event of battle, of carrying ammunition from the ponies and serving it out to the men in the front line. The weaknesses of such an improvised reorganization were to become apparent later under stress. The baggage column, which was supposed to be loaded and formed up by six o'clock, was not ready by the time appointed. The locally-hired Kandahari camel-drivers were neither particularly intelligent, conscientious nor amenable to military discipline, and although they were mostly in position by half-past six, some loads were so badly secured that they soon fell to the ground. This would have been anticipated by Brigadier-General Brooke! However, the head of the main column was able to move off at that time, and the infantry marched at seven when that old enemy, the sun, was well up in the sky and the heat was already beginning to make itself felt.

When the head of the column began to move, Geoghegan sent his sentries ahead as skirmishers while he followed half a mile in rear with his remaining thirty sabres as advance party of the advance guard. Behind, at a distance of half a mile, followed Captain Mayne of the 3rd Light Cavalry with his squadron deployed in line, followed at a short distance by Major Blackwood with four of his 9-pounder guns, the divisions of Lieutenants Maclaine and Fowell – the latter not to be confused with Lieutenant Fowle of the smooth-bore battery. After another small gap came the rest of the 3rd Light Cavalry under Major Currie, but he soon moved forward to join Geoghegan and the advance party. A. M. Monteith (there were no less than three Lieutenants Monteith with the force) and his squadron stayed on his piquet until the column arrived parallel to him, and then descended from the hill to become the left flanking party. Behind the cavalry brigade marched the infantry in line of columns, leaving sufficient room between regiments so as to be able to deploy and form line if necessary. On the right were the 66th Foot. In the centre were Jacob's Rifles and on the left the Grenadiers; between them was the improvised smooth-bore battery escorted by Lieutenant Henn and his No 2 Company, Bombay

THE ADVANCE TO CONTACT



Sappers and Miners. The baggage plodded, lurched and swayed to the right of the main body of infantry, guarded in front and on its flanks by the two native companies allotted for the purpose, while the company of the 66th Foot under Captain Quarry moved immediately behind. The right flanking party consisted of Lieutenant Smith of the Sind Horse, while the rearguard was commanded by Colonel Malcolmson of that regiment, who had with him his own remaining ninety-six sabres and Lieutenant Osborne's two guns of E/B under command.

With St John were Wali Sher Ali Khan and a small mounted retinue; the rest of the Afghan governor's horsemen had either gone back to Kandahar or had quietly slipped away.

The force advanced in a north-easterly direction between the nearly dry beds of the Khushk-i-Nakhud and Garmao (now called Garm Ab) Rivers. The main Kandahar-Girishk highway was crossed soon after leaving camp, and the men saw the mud fort of Morcha standing less than a mile to their right. At first the route lay through cultivated fields irrigated from karezes (strings of wells connected together by underground water-channels), but these became sparser and poorer as the ground rose and the river bent away to the right. The land became harder – baked sand and gravel thinly spread, small occasional tussocks; and the stark hills of the Khushk-i-Nakhud mountain range began to shimmer in the eastern haze.

The transport now began to become really annoying. Some camels, the more debilitated, dropped back and received little urging from drivers who did not care whether they stopped or not. Others threw off the loads which had been badly tied in the first place. So at eight o'clock the whole column had to stop for twenty minutes to let the laggards catch up, and there was another halt of nearly an hour at Mashak for the same reason. Here at least there was an abundance of water for man and beast. The cavalry and artillery of the advance guard found time to water their horses, while the sowars and the gunners, and later most of the infantry, managed to fill their water bottles. But Surgeon Dane of the Grenadiers complained that although the rest of the column got water, his regiment did not – apparently the left flank was furthest from the stream, and the men were

not allowed to fall out, leave their position and go over to it. This extraordinary behaviour was quite normal in those days – nobody saw anything wrong in drinking water probably contaminated by the sewage of an Afghan village in the middle of the cholera season, so long as it looked clean; and most of those who did so probably got away with it.

Some officers had their breakfast, but the men of the native infantry got nothing, as no preparations had been made. Then at about a quarter to ten the column took the road again, having covered four miles since first light nearly five hours earlier. After a mile, half-way between Mashak and Karez-Ak, Burrows, St John and the Wali were accosted by a group of respectable-looking villagers, who produced grapes and entered into formal conversation. After the usual courteous preliminaries, it transpired that the whole affair was an elaborate screen for one of St John's spies to make his report without coming under suspicion. He had ridden post-haste from Ayub Khan's camp at Sangbur only that morning with news that the Sirdar was already on his way to Maiwand, and that some of his cavalry might already be there.

So it appeared that everything was turning out as Smith had been told it would when he was at Maiwand two days earlier. Burrows was waiting for confirmation by St John's agents and now he had got it, too late to make any difference. Even as this intelligence was being discussed, messengers came galloping back from both Monteith and Geoghegan to say that mounted men were to be seen on the left, moving across the column's front towards Maiwand.

There was a small hillock visible to the right of the line of march near Karez-Ak, so Burrows and St John immediately pushed on ahead through the advance guard and climbed it to see what they could of the ground to the north. There was haze and some mirage, but from the mound it was obvious that bodies of cavalry were moving east across the brown, dry plain stretching from Garmao to Maiwand. Behind them were groups of dark, shapeless masses, but whether these were horse, infantry or trees, it was at first impossible to say. Unfortunately, the bad visibility which obstructed this first attempt to estimate the

strength of the enemy was to last throughout the day, tricking commanders into wrong assumptions and bad decisions.

As nobody could make up his mind, even with the aid of field-glasses, Major Hogg, brigade-major of the cavalry brigade, was ordered to ride forward and see what he could make of the situation. He galloped out nearly half a mile beyond the most advanced scouts of Monteith's left flanking party and saw a group of six hundred to eight hundred enemy horsemen moving across the front about three-quarters of a mile away. They had neglected to put out scouts on their right flank and did not seem to have caught sight of the British column up to this time. Now, however, the sudden appearance of Major Hogg may have drawn their attention to it, as he saw them change direction, inclining more to their left, leaving small parties to watch the advancing column's progress. From where he was, the configuration of the ground was such that Hogg was unable to see any infantry or guns, so he returned to report. He had only been away for about ten minutes, but during that time Leach had been called forward. He knew the ground from his survey of the area, and said that he was quite sure there were no trees on the western part of the plain; the dark masses behind the Afghan horsemen must be infantry.

Burrows then accepted that he had come up against Ayub Khan's main army.

3

Ayub Khan and his entourage of friends and henchmen were probably riding ahead of the main body, clear of the dust. Here was no plump and elderly oriental despot plucked from the musky cushions of his harem, no foppish dilettante yearning for the joy-boys of Herat Bazaar. The Sirdar, dressed in turban and flowing robes, would have been alert and upright in his saddle, a man in the prime of life—prince and rebel, governor and general, a soldier of many battles and hard-pressed sieges, an officer who still carried a drill manual in his field equipment. He had got rid of the pot-bellied sycophants surrounding him in

his capital, fawning and flattering, cognizant of nothing but self-interest and senile dignity. None of this protocol rattle-taggle had progressed beyond Farah; his companions were now mostly men of his own age, in the early thirties or younger, spurred on by the hope of victorious battle, of regaining lost estates or of seizing new land and plunder. Not least among them would have been grim ascetics who desired only to slay the infidel or die in the attempt.

The morning sun beat down upon them from above and was reflected in angry waves of heat from the bare slopes of the Shah Maqsud mountains to their left, north of the Maiwand Plain. The pale-blue treachery of early morning mirage which had shown false images of cool stretches of water seemingly only a hundred yards away had been reduced in potency to a waning dervish shimmer in the middle distance.

Behind the command group, a warrior host debouched from the dry ravine of the Garmao River – in springtime a red-brown torrent of rushing spate, now only a chain of sporadic green-scummed hollows. They paced lightly over the sand and gravel, surging across the arid courses that earlier in the year had carried away racing storm-water from the foothills. Due to their first-light start, the sun had not yet gained a mastery over bodies and minds. Tough, fatalistic, inured to privation, these men would have cared little that they had not been able to refill their waterskins at Garmao. Maiwand was nearly in sight, with a promise of good water and full bellies among its streams and granaries. Steadily they pressed on, moving with the long, springy strides of tribesmen. Perhaps, to pass the time, they conducted intimate conversations at the tops of high-pitched voices with any friends who happened to be within fifty yards distance, chatting amicably of all the wonderful slaughter, rape and loot waiting for them in Kandahar, not now so very far away. The swashbuckler bandit side by side with the dedicated ghazi swaggered or paced grimly onwards around the ranks of regular infantry, whose lean soldiery trudged onwards with broken step. The small khan with his little band of relations and retainers, the mullah on his ass, the wizened drummer toting his instrument on his back, all combined to form the inimitable semi-organized rabble of a

mediaeval army on its way. Young men with once clear complexions burned dark-brown by sun and wind. Hawk-nosed elders, faces of pock-marked crinkled leather, red-rimmed eyes puckered against the grit and glare, mouths gaping with great snaggle-toothed grins in light-hearted exchanges of bawdy reminiscence. So had marched Timur-i-Leng, so also Jenghis Khan and his Golden Horde – menacing, engulfing, inexorable.

Soon a horseman would have come galloping back from the Lui-Naib to report having seen Major Hogg – unmistakably a British officer, easily recognized as such by his helmet. It appears, however, that the Sirdar was not particularly impressed by this information. He was aware that his enemy was in the habit of sending regular patrols to Maiwand in troop or squadron strength, and that Hogg might easily have come from one of these. Whatever might be in the wind, all the more reason for pushing on at all speed to secure the fort – keeping a sharp look-out towards the right flank. So he continued to lead his army across the plain.



The whole point of Burrows's march north from Khushk-i-Nakhud had been to seal off the mouth of the Khakrez Valley and thereby prevent Ayub Khan from getting to Ghazni. He must have realized by now that the Sirdar had covered twelve miles from Sangbur during the time that it had taken him to travel six from Khushk-i-Nakhud, and was going to reach the vital track-junction north-east of Maiwand first – some of the Lui-Naib's horsemen might already be there, and the remainder would arrive before long. The Afghan main body had six miles to go, which would take them two hours, unencumbered as they were by a slow baggage-train and the need to guard it through hostile territory. His own cavalry and horse artillery could reach the track-junction in an hour if he decided to split his column, but they would be unlikely to delay Ayub Khan's army, and might get into serious trouble. Brigadier-General Massy with the 9th

Lancers and a Royal Horse Artillery battery had been compelled to retreat for their lives, and had lost the guns, through trying to take on a large Afghan force commanded by Mushk-i-Alam and Mahomed Jan near Kabul only seven months previously. Burrows would have known that if he kept the whole of his column of combat troops and transport together he could move only at the speed of the slowest beast – the two miles an hour maximum for bullocks and weak camels. His infantry on its own would have eight miles to march, and would reach the objective an hour after the Afghans.

If he continued to advance on Maiwand with his whole force, the Sirdar would probably prefer to stand and fight rather than abandon a strong and well-provisioned base to start another long march. But if the Afghans lost the ensuing battle they would have no option other than to retreat in the very direction that he had been ordered to prevent them from taking – up the Khakrez to Ghazni. What is more, he would not be able to catch up with them.

There was only one course open to him, to go straight into the attack. He would have failed most miserably in his duty unless he could bring the enemy to battle at once. This could be done in two ways. Either by persuading Ayub Khan that it would be to his advantage to stop and fight rather than carry on to Maiwand; or by posing such a threat to the Afghan marching column that the Sirdar would be compelled to stop and defend himself. He had to take the offensive. It remained to decide how to set about it.

The words of the directive stating that he might attack Ayub Khan 'if you consider yourself strong enough to do so' would not have influenced Burrows's decision; they probably never even passed through his mind. Apart from the fact that he was undoubtedly a man of courage, no two-brigade British force had so far during the war failed to win the day. He expected to be outnumbered by three to one in infantry, discounting the enemy's irregulars, and by the same proportion in artillery, and he would not have considered this too great odds. Those elements of his brigades which had been in action had done well, and there was no reason to suppose that the others would be any

different. He should, therefore, be able to use his better command structure and speed of reaction, his superior discipline and battle experience to neutralize Ayub Khan's numerical superiority and to silence his guns.

So – to attack his enemy he would have to cross a ravine running close to the left of the Maiwand track and then traverse several miles of what appeared to be a flat and waterless plain ending in low hills. Conditions for observation were poor, but there did not seem to be any other natural features except for some villages a mile or two further on towards Maiwand on his side of the ravine, which seemed to become deeper as it approached them.

A direct advance at all speed towards Ayub Khan's army would still mean separating his force into its elements of cavalry, infantry and transport, although the distances between them would not be so great as if he had headed for Maiwand. If he succeeded in his aim of bringing Ayub Khan to battle he would have to fight in a desert where he would certainly have no water, whereas the Sirdar might find some in the Shah Maqsud foothills, or arrange a supply from Maiwand. A better solution might be to establish a defensive position based on the villages and ravine, and this could easily be organized; but in that case Ayub Khan would have no incentive to change direction and attack him – he might not even see what was happening.

It might be possible to compromise by feinting an attack, forcing the enemy to deploy, and then luring him back to fight around the nearer village of Mundabad. A lot would depend on the ground to the enemy side of the Mundabad Ravine, which would need careful reconnaissance; and the village complex would have to be cleared of the enemy if it should turn out to be occupied. The rearguard commander should be able to organize a strong defensive position around Mundabad, using the brick walls of orchards and enclosures as fortifications, with the ravine as an obstacle between him and the Afghans. He had at his disposal not only three infantry companies, but all the other miscellaneous baggage guards, a total of over three hundred bayonets – the equivalent of half a regiment; also most of a cavalry regiment and some guns – Osborne's centre division of

E/B with its two 9-pounders. It should, therefore, be an acceptable risk to leave the baggage and rearguard on their own for a short time, freeing the cavalry of the advance guard and the infantry to make a demonstration against Ayub Khan's marching column.

We do not know if these were the exact thoughts passing through the brigadier-general's mind, as there is no record of the full deliberations on the knoll, nor of the orders issued. But his own narrative and the action taken by units after the order group dispersed indicate that he was planning to reconnoitre the Mundabad complex, clear it of enemy if necessary, put his baggage into it and defend it. Then send the advance guard forward to harass Ayub Khan's column with artillery fire, hoping to draw him on to attack; but this movement was not to begin until Mundabad had been reported clear of enemy, nor until the infantry had closed up and were ready to move behind the cavalry. He had no intention of letting Nuttall get into Massy's position, facing a huge enemy force without infantry support and with an obstacle in his rear. He would reconnoitre personally a defensive position for the main body on the far side of the ravine with the village as a rear bastion, and the front not too far ahead, thereby ensuring a closed leaguer suited for all-round defence. He probably hoped to entice the Sirdar to pursue him back to this firm base. Although there is no definite evidence to this effect, we know from Mr Griesbach of an occasion when Burrows had thought along these lines, which was during the affair with the Lui-Naib four days before. In that instance he had apparently intended that Monteith should fall back gradually, drawing the enemy on until they could be attacked effectively by the whole cavalry brigade, so it is fair to assume that he meant to adopt a similar ruse in this case.

5

The next phase of the battle must be considered in the light of Brigadier-General Burrows's attempts to shift the responsibility

for his own omissions on to the shoulders of Lieutenant Hector Maclaine of the Royal Horse Artillery.

His despatch of 3 August was quite straightforward. 'Advancing on a village which lay about a mile to my front (Mundabad), I placed my baggage there, and on the higher ground I deployed my infantry into line with guns in the centre, and the cavalry on the left, covering movement with two horse artillery guns and a troop of cavalry.' The two horse artillery guns must have been Maclaine's left division of E/B, and this despatch makes no complaint about his conduct. But when Burrows was ordered to expand his account of the battle he wrote a narrative signed on 5 September, in which he made some very different statements which deserve investigation, particularly as they aroused a certain amount of indignation among his other officers. He says that he sent Nuttall forward with some cavalry and two horse artillery guns to reconnoitre Mundabad, as he intended to occupy it and place his baggage there. At the same time he himself moved leisurely on from the knoll towards the Mundabad Ravine meaning to halt and rest the men for a few minutes, during which time he would look around and decide the positions for his troops. But to his intense surprise, at this moment he saw two horse artillery guns gallop to the front, followed by a troop of cavalry, and disappear over the crest of the plain two miles off. He at once sent Lieutenant Dobbs, the Acting Deputy Assistant Commissary-General, to recall them, but without success. He then heard the guns in action, and claims that, 'I was compelled to send the cavalry and artillery in support at once and hasten on the infantry. Thus the whole affair was precipitated, and I lost the opportunity of reconnoitring the enemy and selecting the position in which I would give battle.' On making inquiries he found that the guns were Maclaine's.

Burrows's narrative was one of those written by all surviving officers on orders from the Commander-in-Chief. They are vague and often contradictory on what actually happened throughout the battle, with a natural tendency to defend the authors' own actions and cover up any short-comings of their own particular arm. Most officers avoid any direct comment on Maclaine's actions except for Leach, who was motivated by the

desire to defend the reputation of 'a gallant officer since deceased'. A loyal subordinate, he makes no accusations against his brigadier-general, but goes so far as to say that Burrows was 'mistaken' about the affair. If, however, one falls back on fringe intelligence, that most reliable of all sources, and considers all the statements which the authors would not have considered to bear directly on the subject, it is possible to get a very good idea of what actually happened.

There is no doubt that Nuttall and Blackwood were sent forward to Mundabad, accompanied by Currie, Mayne and his squadron, and Fowell's centre division of E/B. As regards their task, Burrows says that they were to reconnoitre. We have a contradiction here, as Veterinary-Surgeon Oliver of E/B, who had managed to listen to the instructions on the knoll (to the present day, infantry commanders complain about the number of gunner adherents who infiltrate order groups if permitted!), says that he heard Blackwood say to Burrows, 'I had better go forward to the edge of that village and open fire'. MacLaine and his left division were left behind awaiting orders to move. It seems clear that he was to find a crossing further down the Mundabad Ravine where the banks were less steep, while Blackwood was going to try and get over at Mundabad itself. Mayne heard Blackwood tell MacLaine, 'I cross here, you cross further down'. Currie says, 'MacLaine was sent to find a better crossing to the left.'

This was quite in accordance with normal practice of battery movement. Blackwood could see that he might have difficulty in getting Fowell's guns over the ravine at Mundabad, where the banks fell a sheer fifteen to twenty feet in places; and by giving MacLaine these orders he was ensuring that some guns would speedily be available on the far side to support the cavalry, without their having to wait if he got stuck, or go on unsupported – as at Girishk. As to when he should start, the whole essence of the operation was to avoid wasting time, so Blackwood would have been most unlikely to say, 'Await my orders to move'. It is much more probable that he said something in the nature of 'Move off when you see me start to cross'. MacLaine would then have been responsible for watching

carefully, riding forward if necessary to keep his major in sight; if he had to move out of visual contact with his division to do so, his gun group would have sent out a connecting link on horseback to relay his hand-signals. When he saw Fowell's division start to move, he would have galloped back, giving the appropriate hand-signals as he went to get his men mounted and ready to follow as soon as he got back to them. The crux is – when did he start to cross?

The first point to establish is the time when Nuttall started over the ravine. As his party reached Mundabad they were joined by Geoghegan and his squadron who had been told to secure the village for the baggage. Blackwood asked him to comb through the village and some enclosures beyond it to make sure that there were no enemy to threaten his guns. Geoghegan did so and reported all clear. Even then, according to Hogg and Mayne, Nuttall remained where he was for a time before starting to cross. It could not have been a stop of very long duration, as neither Currie nor Fowell consider it worthy of mention.

After the order group Leach and Captain Harris, the Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General, had been sent to call up the infantry, who now arrived, wheeled left and deployed into line along the ravine's near bank, where they halted. The transport column, which had been on their right, wheeled left when they did and was close behind them near Mundabad.

Nuttall moved away as soon as the infantry were deployed and ready, which was probably what he had been told to do. There are no descriptions of gallopers tearing around issuing panic orders to advance – and a number of officers would have made mention of this if it had happened. Nor did Nuttall cross without orders, or there would have been a tremendous outcry in Burrows's narrative, not to mention partisan argument in those of their respective staff officers. So it can safely be taken that the advance towards the enemy was set in motion in accordance with previous orders.

The next point to settle is the time at which MacLaine galloped to the front. Let us suppose that he rode back at all speed as soon as he saw Fowell's guns move, and led his division over

an easy crossing to the left rear, where the left-hand regiment, the Grenadiers, would have been starting to advance. Reverting to fact, this is exactly what happened. Captain Grant, commanding the left wing of the Grenadiers, says that he saw one or two guns crossing the ravine just before he did. Surgeon Dane of the same regiment confirms this, and amplifies it to state that they were two guns of the Royal Horse Artillery, which crossed immediately in front of him and went on ahead. The cavalry escort had been provided through Hogg's initiative. Towards the end of the short halt at Mundabad Nuttall had sent his brigade-major to the rear with a message, and he was on his way back when he saw Maclaine cross the ravine alone with his guns. He took it upon himself to send Monteith and his left-flanking squadron galloping after them to protect the artillery.

When the advance north from Mundabad began, Fowell says that he followed Blackwood across the ravine without undue difficulty and came into action on the other side. Finding that the range to the enemy was too great, they limbered-up again and advanced another thousand yards, and it was while they were doing this that he saw Maclaine going forward at the gallop to the left. Mayne also says that he crossed the ravine with Blackwood and Fowell, and then saw Maclaine and his escort of cavalry galloping off towards the enemy. Maclaine, if anything, seems to have been a bit slow! Admittedly he had to get back to his division and then forward again, but his crossing had been over easy gradients and the going on the far side had been flat and firm. Yet he was coming abreast of Fowell after the latter had done a less comfortable crossing and had already been in and out of action, all of which takes time. He was only now approaching the position in which Burrows claims that he first saw him and was 'compelled to send the cavalry and artillery in support at once and hasten on the infantry'. Far from them being sent after him, he had just succeeded in drawing level!

The first member of Burrows's staff to see Maclaine and draw the brigadier-general's attention to him was Harris, who together with Leach had had ample time to go and 'hasten on the infantry' and come back again. According to Leach, Burrows showed no anxiety at all about Maclaine, though he did not approve of

guns being so far forward and sent Dobbs to fetch him back. The infantry had advanced at least half a mile beyond the ravine on to the open plain and were nearly on the field of battle before he got around to asking Nuttall and Blackwood about it.

So far Maclaine had only acted in the way that would have been expected of him, but he had no intention of leaving matters at that. He was a young officer and a very efficient one, otherwise he would not have been selected to serve in the Royal Horse Artillery. He would have been expected to use his initiative, not merely abide by the letter of his instructions. Undoubtedly, he was also impelled by the urge to be first into action this time, after his tribulations at Girishk and against the Lui-Naib's cavalry. So now he headed straight for the enemy until he came within range of the Afghan horsemen, then came into action and opened fire on them. Blackwood, who had seen what he was up to, exclaimed, 'Those guns are going much too far to the left!' and sent a trumpeter to recall him. Dobbs was already on his way and caught up with Maclaine when he had fired four rounds and the enemy had withdrawn out of sight. He passed on Burrows's orders. Unfortunately, even in those days, officers who happened to be in the Royal Horse Artillery or Old Etonians were sometimes disinclined to listen to subalterns in the Commissariat, and Maclaine, besides belonging to both categories, was no exception to the rule. He pointed out to Dobbs that he was in no danger whatever and would stay precisely where he was while Dobbs reported back to the brigadier-general—who would be sure in the circumstances to issue different orders. Blackwood's trumpeter, needless to say, was equally unsuccessful! To end the story before going back to deal in detail with the column's crossing over the Mundabad Ravine, Maclaine was eventually persuaded to return to the fold and rejoin his battery, but only through the combined efforts of Hogg, Harris and Leach!

It is submitted that the implication, or rather accusation, that the whole force, from brigadier-general to drummer-boy, dropped everything and went streaming across Afghanistan to rescue Maclaine is refuted by the evidence. It was in no way character-

istic of Brigadier-General Burrows, whose trials by the time that he wrote his narrative, and the witch-hunt had begun, probably tended to warp his loyalty to his subordinates and impede his good judgement.

It is sad that some accounts of the battle have taken his narrative at its face value and cast aspersions on the good name of a gallant officer.

6

We take up the story again at the point when Nuttall decided that the time had come to cross the Mundabad Ravine. He would have given the word to Mayne, and the cavalry screen would have fanned out on the near bank before slithering and plunging down the slope. Pausing briefly at the bottom to reform, they then broke into a canter to gain momentum for scrambling up the far side. On reaching the top they deployed a short distance ahead and halted to screen the guns' crossing.

Blackwood moved forward with Nuttall, and Fowell led his division over the edge of the ravine. The detachment commanders carefully picked a way for their guns and wagons. It was easier than they had expected, the down slope was fairly steep but the ground held well together. The stocky little wheel-horses strained back almost on their haunches in the breeching of their special harness, to hold back their limbers and guns, sliding down with a cascade of sand and stones, hooves ploughing great, dusty furrows in the yellow earth as they disputed every step against the thrust of their limber-poles. The wheel-drivers fought to hold their horses back, lest the traces between them and the lead and centre drivers should become slack, a leg should get over a loose thong and tumble the whole team pell-mell into disaster. Behind each artillery piece came one of the gunners on foot, an arm through his horse's reins as he manned the brake-wheel on his gun, anxiously keeping the pressure of the shoe on the iron wheel-rim, strong enough to help the efforts of the wheelers but at the same time not so fierce as to cause the wheels to lock and the gun to begin a

sideways slide out of control. Reaching the broad sand and gravel bed of the ravine, the brakes were freed, the gunners remounted. Numbers One, the detachment commanders, called their teams forward, drivers kicked their mounts into a trot, slapped whips over the necks of their led horses and went for the opposite slope at a trot. Some quick whip-work, hoarse cries of threat and encouragement, and the division was over the brow, wheels crunching comfortably over the hard earth and pebble surface.

The smooth plain ran gently upwards, north to the skyline a mile ahead where the ground was dotted with Afghans of Ayub Khan's cavalry screen, a motley collection of regular troopers and mounted tribesmen, their drab greys and khakis relieved by the occasional red or green jacket of some dandy, a well-to-do farmer's son or a petty chieftain. Several hundred horsemen could be distinguished, and many others faded dimly into the mirage over the top of the convex slope. On the command 'Action front!' the gun teams wheeled and halted, horseholders grabbed their detachments' mounts and cantered away with them to the rear. Trail-eyes were jerked free by sweating gunners. 'Drive on!' they yelled, and the teams trotted off to the wagon-lines, as gun-detachments heaved their trails around until muzzles faced the enemy. The noise and dust subsided, the hoof-beats died away and a sudden silence fell as Numbers One listened for their next orders. Then the two guns belched a salvo, and again, but it was no use – visibility was too poor by far for seeing whether any damage had been done to the Afghans, or even for observing fall of shot. All that could be said was that the enemy were drifting slowly back into the haze, which was the last thing that Blackwood wanted, knowing that he must goad the Afghan main force to give battle without delay. 'I must get much nearer!' he cried to Nuttall. And almost before the cavalry brigade commander had given his assent he found himself and his escort galloping after the gunner major northward up the gradient. Behind came Fowell, terrain like a parade ground, no obstacles for his division to avoid – then the teams and their guns flying smoothly over this perfect surface, exhilarated gunners riding escort. Cavalry matched artillery, riding

protection on both sides, while the forward screen spurred frantically to keep ahead of Blackwood.

On the flanks of their advance, deep, dry water-courses running up from the Mundabad Ravine grew gradually shallower, becoming mere dips in the ground as the party topped the slope and emerged onto the broad plateau of Maiwand. Now at last they could see. And what a spectacle it was! Nearly three miles of open plain, small stones interspersed with little thorny tussocks, led up to the foothills and spurs of the northern mountains. On the left was the entrance to the Garmao Valley, on the right Maiwand's mud fort squatted astride the road from Khushk-i-Nakhud to Khakrez, the dome of the village mosque close by shining in the bright sunlight. Between the two swarmed hordes of mounted enemy, and behind them, partially visible despite the dust, stretching out in a great, irregular column, marched the dark masses of Ayub Khan's infantry. The more distant were but ugly smudges in their accompanying clouds of yellow dust, surging shapeless through the flicker of mirage; but the nearer regiments were only a mile and a half away, at good artillery fighting range. Not bothering about cover or any more reconnaissance Blackwood ordered his two guns into action as quickly as he could, with no consideration other than to make the enemy react to his presence. He realized that he would need every gun that he could get, and asked Nuttall for Osborne's division of E/B to be called forward from the rearguard, and for the smooth-bore battery as well. Nuttall agreed. He was fully aware that he wanted more guns; and not only guns, but infantry – in a hurry! If his stratagem worked, Ayub Khan's whole army would converge upon him. Besides, he could now see large numbers of men dressed in the white battle-garb of the ghazi sallying forth from Maiwand to take him in the flank if he was not careful. So he sent his orderly officer, Lieutenant J. Monteith, hurrying back down towards Mundabad to urge these requests upon the force commander.

Burrows met Monteith on his way, sent him on to see that Nuttall's needs were met, and arrived at the gun position a few minutes later. At first he occupied himself in blustering about the Maclaine affair, then he deployed Nuttall's cavalry to protect

the area and remained himself with Blackwood, studying the ground and presumably making his appreciation and plan of action.

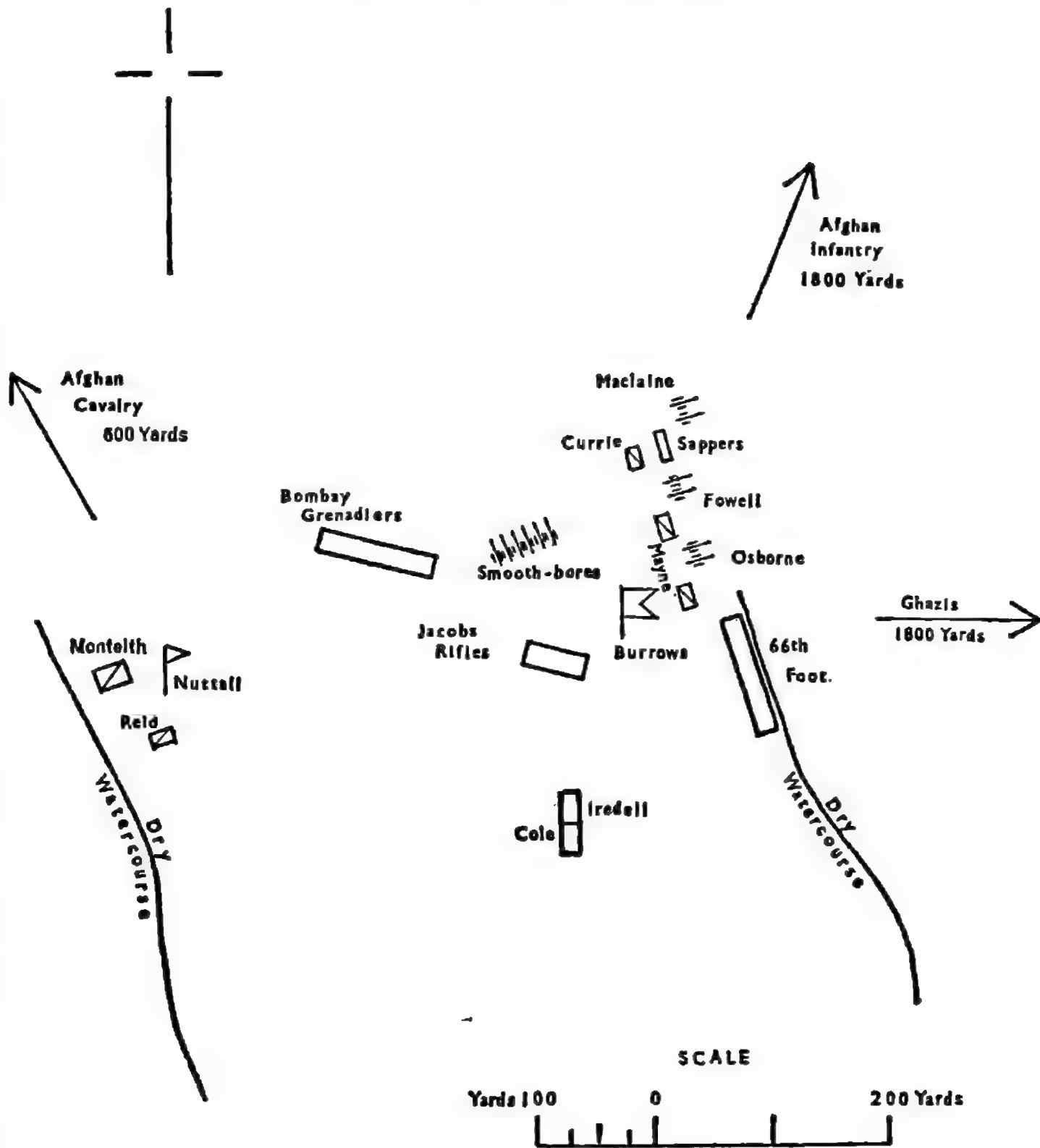
His main body was well on its way forward. The infantry had crossed the ravine, splashing through some shallow pools and clambering up the steep slopes on the far side. Lieutenant-Colonel Anderson, who commanded the Grenadiers, was mounted on a powerful Australian horse, one of the first of the famous Walers, a breed still at that time under trial in India. But even this powerful animal was unable to carry his fifteen stone weight straight up the bank, and had to pick a diagonal way. Jacob's Rifles were highly excited at the prospect of action, in which they were confident of giving a good account of themselves, and the younger recruits laughed and chattered to such a degree that it was difficult to maintain discipline and keep the line in order. After crossing, the advance was continued in column.

Monteith came clattering back, passed his messages, and carried on to collect Osborne and his division from Colonel Malcolmson of the rearguard.

The first from the main body to push on ahead was Captain Slade, followed by his improvised battery of smooth-bore guns and howitzers, neither sufficiently well-mounted nor skilled to pull its pieces at the gallop, but chinking steadily forward at a thumping trot to drop into action about one hundred and fifty yards to the left of Fowell. Behind them their escort of Sappers and Miners made the best time they could on foot, catching up with them after they had deployed on their gun position. A few minutes later Osborne and his guns came roaring up at the gallop and dropped trails on Fowell's right at the standard forty yards distance from him.

Burrows's brigade-major, Heath, came cantering back to Colonel Mainwaring of Jacob's Rifles and asked if he had established a reserve. The colonel replied that he had received no instructions to do any such thing, so naturally had not done so. Heath suggested that he should do so forthwith and watched while Mainwaring detached his whole left wing, four companies under Major Iredell. The major was ordered to halt where he

MAIWAND AT MIDDAY



was; then, after letting the column get ahead, to follow two hundred to three hundred yards in rear.

A mile north of the Mundabad Ravine the infantry eventually came up with the cavalry and artillery. They saw Mayne's squadron lined up, mounted, between the two E/B divisions and slightly to their rear, with Currie and a troop on his left. Watching the left flank were Nuttall and Lieutenant Reid's troop of the 3rd Light Cavalry, together with some troopers of the Sind Horse. In the middle the smooth-bore battery was in position. The infantry regiments were told to deploy into line again and to lie down behind the guns. It was then eleven o'clock.

Ten minutes later Maclaine returned with his guns and escort, and came into action a defiant two hundred and fifty yards to Fowell's left. It was not until nearly half an hour later that this extremely stubborn young officer was finally forced into his correct distance of forty yards, and even then he was forward of the battery gun line. Monteith was sent over to the left of the brigade position to come under Nuttall's command.

7

Ayub Khan had continued on his way, pending reliable information from his right flank. He would soon have been told that there were definite signs of movement among the villages to the south but that no one could yet say what it might portend – then, suddenly, the sound of gunfire from below and an eddy of irregular tribal horsemen recoiling from the danger. Soon he was watching a regiment of cavalry and some guns advancing rapidly from the low ground, his own scattered outposts withdrawing slowly before them. As he gazed, the British halted, cavalry deployed to either flank, and puffs of smoke billowed from the centre. Two shells burst harmlessly among the dispersed irregulars, almost simultaneously with the thud-thud of field guns. While he was pondering the implications of this manœuvre, more activity became apparent in the enemy rear and lines of khaki infantry came into view, among them a continuous flurry of horse and artillery. He could scarcely believe his luck that so

small a force was waiting in the open for his vast hordes to overwhelm it. He was delighted. Turning to his staff, he announced piously that Fate had decreed that the unbelievers should be destroyed.

The plan that he now set in motion was to surround the small British army with his own immensely superior numbers and then to launch a simultaneous assault from all sides. He explained to the over-cautious that not even the British could shoot with everything in all directions at once. Surrounded, undoubtedly, by a stream of advice from all sides, he gradually made his arrangements, gave orders to his officers, persuaded the tribal leaders, encouraged the Wali's mutinous troops – who had already come up against Burrows's brigades, and probably now bore expressions of crestfallen indetermination – and sent liaison officers to coordinate the operations of the Maiwand sortie, soldiers and ghazis, with his own dispositions and intentions. A Kizilbash artillery colonel would have been in attendance to receive his own special instructions, then gallop away to put them into effect. Ayub Khan could now afford to make his deployment at leisure, ignoring the occasional whiplash of a bursting shell.

8

Things were happening too fast for Burrows. He had told Blackwood to engage the enemy, and the major had done so, but he had, with Nuttall's permission, gone a lot further ahead than Burrows had expected. Anxious to find out for himself what was happening, he had now come forward without doing a reconnaissance for a defensive position in the Mundabad area, nor even arranging for one to be done. Moreover, in the stress of the moment, he had either forgotten to send any orders to the rearguard, or they had not been delivered. So far from occupying and defending Mundabad, Malcolmson was still shepherding the plodding mass of camels and baggage forward across the ravine in the tracks of the infantry, having had no instructions to do anything else. It was Nuttall who noticed what was happen-

ing, and he sent Griesbach back to stop them and turn them around.

The situation was that Burrows now occupied a position dictated solely by the needs of artillery observation and the range of his guns. He had to decide whether to advance, stay where he was, or retire on Mundabad. There were many more enemy than he had anticipated, now that he was able to see them more clearly. Ghazis were pouring out from Maiwand in hundreds, and it looked as though they would be the first to hit him. Ayub Khan's main body was wheeling cumbrously towards him from the line of march – which was what he had aimed for. Hordes of cavalry were strung out all over the front but as yet there was no sign of the enemy artillery. The ground over which the Afghans were advancing towards him seemed to be flat. Currie had said something about a ravine two hundred to three hundred yards away between themselves and Maiwand, but there was nothing to be seen, so he was probably wrong. His own position was also pretty flat, but there was a small dry water-course running along the line of guns back towards Mundabad, becoming deeper as it went, which was roughly at right angles to the ghazi advance from Maiwand. He judged that this should give some cover to troops deployed to repel this attack if it materialized. He saw no point in advancing, as the enemy were coming towards him. He could not, on the other hand, withdraw on Mundabad until the transport had been got back out of the way. In any case, the enemy main force was not yet sufficiently committed as to justify his pulling out at this stage, when he could probably inflict heavy casualties on them as they came on across the open plain.

Whatever his appreciation may have been, he decided to stay where he was, possibly as a temporary measure only, accepting a gap of nearly a mile between himself and his rearguard, an open space guarded tenuously by Nuttall's cavalry on his left flank.

CHAPTER 7

The Battle of Maiwand

1

IT HAD BEEN shortly before eleven o'clock when Blackwood opened fire from his final position. He still wanted to make sure of goading his enemy to attack, and with this aim in view he shot at every gathering of infantry and cavalry that presented itself. The problem was to see the effect of his shelling. He was either engaging a dispersed screen of cavalry dotted all over the plain in small groups which were difficult to hit, or burying his rounds among the dark-brown shapeless masses of foot-soldiers a mile and a half distant towards the Shah Maqsud Mountains.

For half an hour the Afghans fired nothing in return, employing the time in closing up the regular infantry and bringing the artillery forward from the rear. The batteries moved up slowly and carefully, making good use of every rise and dip in the ground to conceal their approach, which was masked not only by tricks of dust and haze, but also by the journeyings hither and thither of the rest of their army. At a quarter past eleven they were in action, for the most part unseen by the British, deployed in a crescent facing south at right angles to their original line of march; the western horn overlapped the British left and tended to take the rest of the line in enfilade. One by one they opened fire until thirty guns were in action. After a few rounds a four-gun battery ceased firing and withdrew to the rear, not to be used again, but the remainder continued the bombardment. So began an artillery duel which went on until noon with neither side inflicting significant damage on the other. The Afghans had chosen their positions so well that it was only possible to spot them by the smoke-puffs of their firing, which gave at the best very rough locations. Visibility was so poor

that it was almost impossible to estimate ranges accurately, even to targets a few hundreds of yards away in some sectors. Leach maintained that Blackwood never did get his ranges properly throughout the day. Consequently accurate destructive shoots on half-hidden pin-point targets were very close to being a waste of time and ammunition, which was borne out by the fact that in the whole battle not a gun was put out of action by artillery fire on either side.

Now Ayub Khan's other orders began to take effect and the various groups of his motley host began to swirl and eddy, marching and counter-marching to and fro into their battle positions. The regular infantry concentrated in the centre approximately where they had deployed from the line of march. To encircle the British left, hordes of regular and irregular cavalry started to trail back from the Lui-Naib's advance guard, dispersed into small, wary groups of two or three horsemen, drifting in a wide detour around to the north-west. While on the British right, the advancing swarms of ghazis from Maiwand were pushing on, some towards the villages of Khig and Mundabad, others straight across the plain to Blackwood's guns. With them came a few mounted tribesmen, but no supporting cavalry.

At noon Burrows had brought his infantry into action, having had about an hour to consider the matter. Up until then they had been lying down behind the guns, resting and drinking up any water that remained in the containers carried forward from Khushk-i-Nakhud. The bhistis (water-carriers) were sent back to the Mundabad Ravine to refill them, but even now they were beginning to become dubious about making the one-mile journey over open ground without armed escort, fearing incursions by the hovering Afghan horsemen.

The 66th Foot were placed in line along the small dry water-course running towards Mundabad from the gun position, and made good use of the cover that it afforded. The Grenadiers formed line to the left of Slade's smooth-bore battery, completely in the open with no cover to be found. Ten minutes later Jacob's Rifles, less Iredell's wing, were brought in between the 66th and Osborne's division of E/B, the watercourse giving a

little cover to the right companies. The Sappers and Miners had already prudently dug themselves in between Fowell and Mac-laine.

Mayne and his squadron were still in the saddle behind Osborne and Fowell, having been given no fresh orders, although the guns were now protected by infantry. But when both flanks began to be threatened with encirclement Burrows ordered Nuttall to face left and deploy A. M. Monteith's squadron and Reid's troop in a dismounted role to keep the enemy cavalry at a distance by carbine fire. Nuttall's orderly officer, J. Monteith, was sent galloping to the rear again, this time to order up Lieutenant Smith and his squadron of the Sind Horse to come forward and bolster A. M. Monteith and Reid. He found Smith on the far side of Mundabad, still on right flank protection, passed his message and departed while Smith was collecting his outposts. Now, however, Colonel Malcolmson came on the scene, found out what was afoot, and had very different ideas. He considered that Smith was needed much more urgently to protect the baggage, so countermanded his brigade commander's orders. Smith had no option but to obey the colonel on the spot rather than the brigadier-general a mile away, and stayed where he was. It was not until an hour later that Monteith, while delivering another message to Malcolmson, noticed that Smith was still with the transport, and galloped over to repeat his message and insist that it be obeyed. The wretched Sind Horse subaltern, caught between contradictory orders, yielded again to the more immediate pressure. He sent a written note to Malcolmson explaining why he had to leave, and got off forward to the battle line as quick as he could to avoid any more trouble.

Behind Mayne's squadron were the artillery gun-teams and limbers, and in rear of the infantry were the regimental reserve echelons, ammunition ponies and medical aid posts—only a hundred yards behind the firing line, and without protection of any kind.

Meanwhile the Afghan cavalry continued their enveloping movement. The Herati and Kabuli regular infantry advanced slowly and carefully until Slade's smooth-bores were able to engage them at a range of eighteen hundred yards. On the

British right, the thousands of ghazis from Maiwand were just over a mile away and coming on fast.

2

The ghazis from Maiwand were the first to pose a serious threat. They had come on across the plain, keeping at first to the track, then passing over the beginnings of the Mundabad Ravine – here a shallow dry bed of cracked mud, small rocks and vicious, grasping thorn clumps – and heading straight for the 66th Foot. As they went they spread out over the open ground, a great swarm of tribesmen in freshly-laundered white robes, purified for battle and death, rested and refreshed after their stay among the villagers after the journey from Khakrez. Forward they strode with their long, swinging gait, large parties gathered in the train of important chieftains, and small clusters of devoted friends determined to fight side by side, come what might, in the unbreakable bonds of blood-brotherhood.

The 66th were ready for them. Less excitable than the sepoy, they waited in quiet confidence to use their new Martini-Henry breech-loading rifles in action for the first time against an attacking enemy. Previously they had been used in anger only against the retreating mutineers at Girishk. All four companies were in line to make maximum use of their fire-power. Colonel Galbraith, a man approaching fifty years old, with carefully trimmed side-whiskers and moustache, was on horseback behind the regiment into which he had purchased his commission as ensign nearly thirty years before, watching the ghazi horde draw slowly closer. Now the white-clad masses paused to form their ranks, a scattering of standards rose up, banners falling slack along their staffs in the windless air. The serried throng began to roll forward quietly and purposefully, moving onward to the assault.

It was not easy to estimate distance over a flat plain with no vertical features to give guidance, but the visibility towards Maiwand was better than in other directions, and on this front the ghazi army kicked up little dust from the hard-baked surface

of uncultivated ground. Galbraith gave an opening range of twelve hundred yards to his company commanders, with instructions to fire volleys in turn, observe the splash pattern of the bullets and adjust their sights accordingly.

At this time the method of controlling infantry rifle fire was a subject of animated discussion in military journals. It was generally agreed that individual aimed fire was unproductive at a distance of over six hundred yards and that volley fire should be used at greater ranges. The theory was that over six hundred yards a soldier might not hit the man whom he was aiming at, but that he might well hit another; and that when a number of men fired at a given object, then some were perfectly sure to hit the mark! So volleys were acceptable up to fifteen hundred yards range and it was predicted confidently that this figure would soon be raised to two thousand. A picked squad of guardsmen had already succeeded in landing fifty per cent of their rounds in a zone fourteen yards wide by seventy yards long at the latter range.

The actual firing of a volley had ceased to be an operation in which a line of men fired simultaneously on the word of command. Instead the infantry followed the *feu-de-joie* procedure. But this was about to change again. Military experts were currently advocating that simultaneous fire by order should be reintroduced. They maintained that the men would then pay attention only to the enemy in their sights instead of being diverted by the need to listen for the man on their right to fire and pull their own triggers immediately afterwards – thereby ensuring a smooth, continuous performance and avoiding censure for slovenly drill!

It was also standard procedure for volleys to be fired standing up. The Martini-Henry rifle was difficult to work lying down because the breech lever for ejecting the spent cartridge was situated underneath, and the man had to roll over on his left side to operate it from the prone position. It was agreed that rifles could indeed be reloaded on the ground, but it was not yet a popular practice – although, strange to say, it was used in the Bombay Army.

At last Galbraith decided that the enemy were close enough,

and gave the order to fire. The first company rose to its feet, presented rifles, and on the command pulled the trigger in turn. The company commander stood to one side, binoculars at the ready, observing the result. With satisfaction he saw a sudden swirl of confusion in the ghazis' front and judged that his bullets had fallen among them. So fired the next company, the next again, and then the fourth. All exacted their toll from the tribesmen, but yet these stern, wild warriors strode on, brushing aside this stinging irritation which killed so few from their huge numbers. But as they came closer, so the fire became fiercer as the beaten zones grew smaller. Galbraith gave permission to fire volleys at will, and what to the tribesmen had been at first a falling spatter of occasional death and harm turned into a lethal storm of mortal danger in their faces, cutting great swathes of destruction in their close-packed ranks. They hesitated at last, standards wavered and sank down, but rose defiantly aloft again as mullahs and chiefs leaped forward to give a lead. No longer a concentrated mass, they worked their way forward in waves of determined groups to gain protection from a fold in the ground still some distance from the British, and unsuspected by them.

Wary of any further approach across the open, the later bodies of ghazis from Maiwand followed down the upper beginnings of the Mundabad Ravine, skirting the thorn bushes and sinking out of sight from the 66th Foot as the dry watercourse deepened gradually into a steep-sided gully. Nearer to Khig, the village north-east of Mundabad, some bands of opportunists carried on to harry the transport with its valuable prizes; while others turned north into the bed of a contributory watercourse which led them by a covered route to join their companions opposite the British infantry. Taking up positions along the bank, they made themselves comfortable and began to fire with gradually increasing intensity at the 66th. Weapons were for the most part poor and badly aimed, and had little effect, but there were soon sufficient bullets whiffing past to give Galbraith reason to make his companies lie down after their volleys and only stand up to fire – practising, presumably, the new lying load!

The ghazi build-up continued. Soon there were several thou-

sand divided between the 66th's front and the village of Khig, with more coming all the time. Newcomers who had not had the salutary lesson dealt out to the vanguard reached the front line and tried to continue their advance, particularly to the southern flank. To contain these efforts Galbraith threw back his right company to face the threat more directly, a movement completed smartly and with precision. It was well that he did so, as enemy fire now became heavier, and the tribesmen were obviously working up to a rush across the intervening flat ground. Their mounted leaders repeatedly galloped out in front, wheeling and circling in the open, urging their men to the assault.

Captain Harris, the DAQMG, had stationed himself near Burrows, but in such a way as to keep a close watch on how his own regiment, the 66th, was faring. He noticed the ghazi concentration and requested his brigadier-general's permission for two of the smooth-bores to be sent to support the right flank. Lieutenant Jones and two 6-pounder guns were duly detailed and came into action to the right of the infantry. As they were out in the open with no protection Galbraith moved his flank company to their far side for local protection. So when the expected rush materialized and waves of ghazis spilled boiling over the nullah bank, they met with a shattering fury of Martini-Henry and artillery fire which swept them from their feet and drove them helter-skelter back whence they had come. During the next half-hour small groups continued to appear and try their luck, always to be dispersed by company volleys. But Harris was still not happy, he felt that something was not quite right. From his vantage point on horseback it seemed to him that the volleys were having more of a morale than a lethal effect and that the bullets appeared to be kicking up the dust too far in front of the enemy, rather than right in among them. He dismounted and went forward to suggest to the company commanders that they should raise their sights. After doing so, and while he was in the act of remounting, a stray shot hit him in the arm, inflicting a nasty flesh wound. Leach helped him to the regimental aid post, from which he was evacuated to the field hospital in the bed of the Mundabad Ravine.

As time passed the 66th sector became quiet. The ghazis

ceased to attempt any further advances, but bided their time. They had ignored all Ayub Khan's couriers, seeing no point in obedience until after they had tried out the British in their own way. But now their first enthusiasm had gone and some of the more turbulent spirits were dead or wounded, so they became content to do as they had been ordered and wait patiently for the general attack planned for later in the day. Soon, apart from single shots by marksmen on both sides, there was comparative peace.

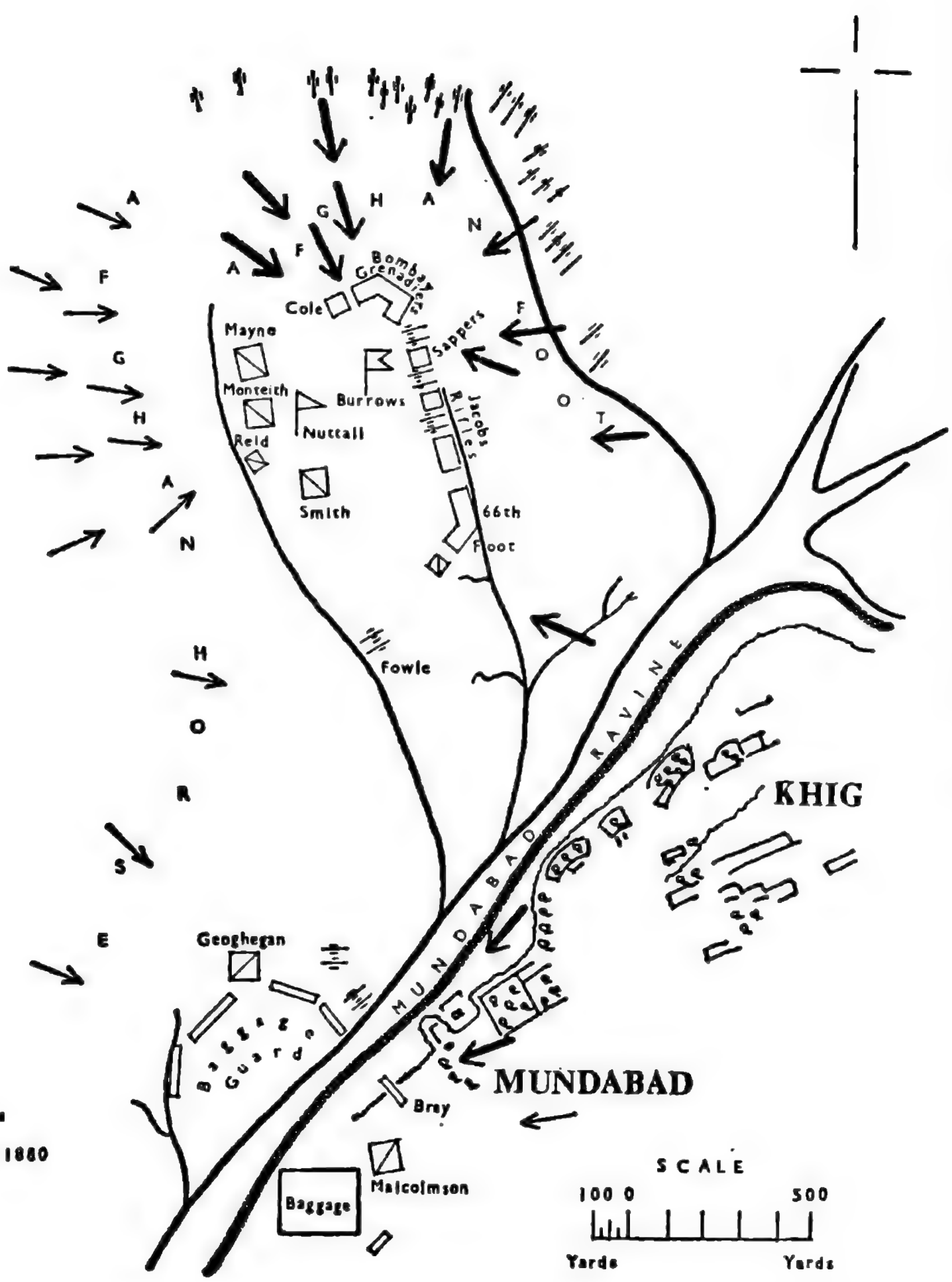
Burrows took advantage of the lull to have Jones fetched back to his battery to help deal with the next threat, which was just beginning to show itself. So the two infantry-manned 6-pounders were limbered-up and trotted away. This caused no worry to the 66th who were now perfectly confident in their ability to hold their opponents without outside assistance. Galbraith brought his protecting company back into touch with its neighbour, but inclined to the right to face the flank.

3

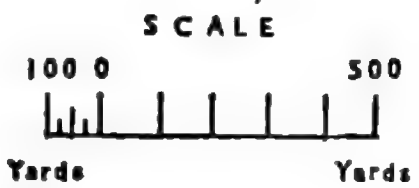
Ayub Khan's next gambit was to increase his threat to the British left with two or three thousand more horsemen. Spread out in loose order the Kabuli regular cavalry and their Herati tribal auxiliaries moved steadily around, keeping eight hundred yards distant – out of effective Snider rifle and carbine range. Sometimes the more audacious riders edged inward, close enough for Grenadier marksmen to try and empty a saddle.

To present an infantry front to this outflanking manœuvre Burrows ordered the Grenadiers to wheel their two left companies slightly back. He also decided to commit the whole of his infantry reserve to prolong the fighting line. Perhaps he meant to call up the three hundred bayonets with the baggage; maybe he intended to pull out and fall back on Mundabad before there could be any question of a reserve being needed. Whatever may have passed through his mind, the fact remains

BATTLE OF MAIWAND



1415 hrs
27 July 1880



that at this very early phase of the battle, when no portion of his force was under stress, he kept no central infantry counter-attack group under his hand for use in emergency to restore a desperate situation. Major Iredell was waiting in rear with his wing of Jacob's Rifles, and he was now directed to send two companies to lengthen the left of the Grenadiers, and the other two to the right of the 66th Foot. He opted to go to the right himself, presumably because he considered that the task there would be more exacting.

The only other British officer with the wing was Lieutenant Cole, a slim young man just twenty-one years old with the beginnings of a small black moustache. He had been in the regiment for no more than two months, so he did not know his men properly, nor did they know him. Iredell sent him to the left flank where the prospect of action seemed less imminent, but this plan was soon brought to nothing. Burrows found that he had not got enough infantry to fill the gaps in his battle line; and realizing that the 66th Foot's front had stabilized recalled Iredell instead of Cole to join Jacob's Rifles in the centre, and take post between Fowell's and Osborne's gun divisions. Cole and his hundred men now found themselves brought into line to lengthen the left flank of Captain Grant's two Grenadier companies which had already been laid back to cover the regiment's rear. Looking to their front they could see the myriad groups of horsemen less than half a mile away, stretching past and behind their own left shoulders. Came the realization, with some disquiet to some of the younger soldiers, that there was no one else anywhere near them to the left. Nuttall's cavalry was to be seen a quarter of a mile distant to the left rear, but there was an enormous gap in between, with nothing to stop the tribesmen coming in and taking them from behind. All was well, however, Burrows, at Nuttall's request, sent Captain Slade and Lieutenant Fowle's two 12-pounder smooth-bore howitzers into action only a hundred yards from Cole's left-hand files. Trails down, they banged away at the Afghan cavalry, but without doing much more than to make them withdraw to a safer place after losing a few horses and men. But they were a great comfort to the many young Pathan recruits in these two isolated *ad hoc* com-

panies of Jacob's Rifles, divorced from their parent regiment and commanded by a strange young British officer who had not yet had time to gain their confidence – and about to fight their first big battle in a key position.

4

It became quiet as artillery fire on both sides slackened. The only Afghan guns firing were those in Ayub Khan's rear, and they did little harm. His other batteries were carefully creeping forward again through the haze and smoke; first the officers searching for covered advance routes, then the guns drawn by their wiry little horses using every small fold or gully to lessen the chance of being seen, inconspicuous among the mass of drifting horsemen who still manœuvred between them and the British. Guns were unlimbered on rear slopes, lean stringy gunners manned wheels, others heaved on drag-ropes, until muzzles crept stealthily forward to rise a few inches over crests and keen, feral eyes glared hatred at their foreign enemies over open sights. Then the detachments rested, squatting by their guns, waiting for orders to fire again. One battery, less cautious than the others, came so close as to be spotted by the Grenadiers, who told Burrows. The British artillery was busy on other targets, but the brigadier-general remembered his days as a regimental commander, and decided to take over. He gave the Grenadiers a range to set on their Snider rifles, ordered them to load, and then up on their feet to fire a volley. But the conditions for observation were so poor that he could not see the splay of bullets on the ground, and was unable to adjust fire on to the hostile guns. He gave up, and the men lay down once more, pleased by this little bit of positive action, happily anticipating more to come.

The British artillery had no clear targets within range, and confined themselves to making horsemen keep their distance. The sun beat malevolently down, its blazing rage reflected up from the shiny, baked mirror-surface of the plain, its relentless

fury eased sometimes by a slight current of air, to beat back with redoubled strength as the atmosphere stilled again. It caused little discomfort to those who had not been up all night and had managed to get a drink of water that morning, as they were not tired. In any case, water-containers had gone the rounds and bhistis were slouching wearily back down the slope to Mundabad to replenish their skins. Burrows's force stretched out in comfort, the heat drying out the sweat in their clothing, looking casually at their distant enemy, becoming accustomed to the jarring clamour of the cannon.

The welcome intermission was short-lived. At half-past twelve it could be seen that the dark seething masses of Afghan infantry were drifting slowly and raggedly into cohesion, clusters of bristling bayonets knitting together into huge menacing squares. In the centre of each phalanx reared a fine blood-red standard. Now from across the scrub and stones of the desert plain would have been heard the quavering exhortations of the holy men, and the throb-potter-tapper of tribal drums.

Burrows knew better than to wait for them to complete their preparations – a crushing blow delivered at this stage, and the whole battle might be over. He called Anderson of the Grenadiers and ordered him to march his regiment forward in line for five hundred yards, and from his new position break up the impending attack with volleys of rifle fire. He was to take Cole and his companies with him. There is very little documentation to tell us about this phase, but it appears that the Grenadiers rose to their feet and advanced in line for a hundred yards before there was any enemy reaction. Then the whole of the Afghan artillery opened fire and a hurricane of shot and shell flew screaming around the regiment. The impression of intensity given by the bombardment was very great. Kizilbash gunners served the Afghan artillery with fanatic enthusiasm and vigour – but aim was wild and casualties inflicted were few. Here and there some poor wretch was smashed backwards through the ranks, rifle flying one way, turban another, life-blood spattering adjacent files as some shell-splinter or cannon-ball struck home. But discipline was never in danger, and the regiment marched on regardless. Captain Grant of the left wing was wounded in

the leg, but got to his feet and struggled on to rejoin his men. But all this was too much for Burrows. He had never allowed for anything like this – full-scale artillery defensive fire at half the range from which the enemy had been engaging until that moment. Although a brave man himself, he could not bear to suffer the loss of anything under his command, be it supplies, transport animals or front-line fighting infantry. Riding close behind the Grenadiers, he shouted above the tumult that the regiment was to halt and take cover. They had covered a bare two hundred yards. The momentum of advance, that priceless commodity, difficult to achieve but once gained never to be impeded in any way, had reached its best. Now the bathos, the let-down, the opportunity lost.

Consolation was soon provided by the prospect of action. The Grenadier group now lay ahead of the British guns, Maclaine's left division of E/B two hundred yards away to their right rear. A half-mile to their front were the Afghan infantry, preparations completed. Their turn now, the Heratis and Kabulis started forward, red banners waving free in the wind of their passage. Anderson studied them silently until the range was right, his men standing tensely in their ranks waiting patiently for the order to fire. When the enemy were eight hundred yards distant the longed-for word of command came at last and five hundred Snider rifles cracked in rapid succession. The range had been judged correctly, sights were properly set. The Herati columns checked momentarily, flinching from the murderous fusillade. Then, brave men, they came on again, the rear ranks stepping over bleeding heaps of wrecked humanity, the silent dead, the writhing wounded. Now the Grenadiers changed to company volleys; but soon the din was such that words of command could not be heard and every soldier fired independently as best he could, grinning, grunting as he rammed home the bullet, cursing and slaying. The Heratis were hurled in all directions by musketry and shellfire, their formation shattered, their impetus gone. Pausing, they looked around and behind and saw how terribly they had suffered. The dark swathes of their defeat – grim death or moaning, mutilated, crawling ruin littered the ground over which they had come, and a relentless tempest of

shell or bullet still slammed through their ranks or sputtered at their feet. They turned, even the most courageous, the retrograde tendency became a rout, some began to run, and the proud Heratis withdrew in disorder until they stopped, shaken and abashed, out of range from their dreadful adversaries.

Anderson remarked to Burrows that the Afghan regulars did not like volley-firing! To which the brigadier-general replied, 'No. But there is no appearance of the rest going!' The Grenadiers were happy men, pleased with themselves and with what they had done. They settled down again in the torrid midday to wait for what fortune would bring next. But now they were thirsty from the energy of the battle, the parching excitement of furious action, throats salty with emotion and raw from powder-smoke. Quartermasters called for the bhistis, but only a few had returned from the ravine and most of these had delivered their loads to the regimental aid post, where Surgeon Dane and his staff were already about their horrid tasks. Now the blazing hostile furnace in the sky above their heads had become an enemy of substance, no longer impotent but rampant and raging with fevered triumph as the sepoys' transient pleasure in their victory succumbed to a pressing need to wet dry throats and free clogged tongues.

The Heratis were worse off. They had suffered all the shock of repulse and defeat in the moment of advancing confidently to success; their losses had been dreadful and they too lacked water. Demoralized as they were, it was only with the greatest difficulty that the surviving officers were able to reform units into viable bodies. Then, with every sign of surly reluctance, and keeping at a very respectful distance, they moved sullenly to their right to pose an infantry threat – for what it was worth – to bolster the Afghan cavalry menace to the British left flank, now more exposed than ever by the Grenadiers' march forward. Burrows was on the spot and decided to lay back the left of his line again to present a front to this new danger, an operation which involved moving Cole and his companies. Cole gave the orders and the men rose to their feet; but instead of performing a disciplined drill-movement they started for the rear in such confusion that it was due only to the efforts of the force com-

mander himself that they were stopped and got down into position. Burrows was horrified at this exhibition; the affair had a great impact on him. His weakest link was lying at a point of great potential danger in his defensive chain, with one flank in the air – and he had no infantry reserve available to reinforce it. His confidence was shaken, which may have influenced his decisions later in the battle to the extent of making him reluctant to move anybody, much less carry out a planned withdrawal to Mundabad.

The Kabuli regular infantry had advanced on the main body of Jacob's Rifles at the same time as the Heratis had made their abortive assault on the Grenadiers and they, too, had been checked and brought to a standstill – but they were not driven back. They began to crawl carefully forward in extended order to form up under some unsuspected cover closer to the British line. There they rested, and the best shots from Jacob's Rifles tried their luck against such opportunity targets as they presented from time to time.

While these battles were going on, and the Afghans being repulsed all along the fighting line, large numbers of ghazis and a few irregular horse had infiltrated into Khig and the eastern outskirts of Mundabad and were engaging the baggage guard.

5

Major Ready of the 66th Foot had been placed in charge of the baggage party before leaving Khushk-i-Nakhud, with orders to conform with the movement of the infantry. So when they halted at the Mundabad Ravine he did likewise; and when they crossed and marched on up the plain, he followed after them. It was not until half the transport were already over on the far side and trekking on towards the firing line that Griesbach arrived to stop them. Ready had no orders to go back, so he stayed where he was and deployed the baggage guard in a V shape across the head of his column. On the left he sited Captain Quarry's company of the 66th, with some of the Grena-

diers, and the Jacob's Rifles company, with the remainder of the Grenadiers, on the right.

Large numbers of enemy cavalry soon arrived to hover about on Quarry's front, occasionally making short rushes towards his line. He had no difficulty in repelling them with rifle fire, and the Afghans withdrew to a safer distance of seven hundred yards. They were no threat, and Quarry kept them in place by sporadic shots from his marksmen. He was rather more annoyed by enemy shot and shell which sometimes flew over the heads of the fighting echelon to land near him. It turned out that Ayub Khan had a battery of modern Armstrong guns which consistently over-estimated the range during this stage of the battle, and kept on landing 14-pound shells among the baggage and its escort.

Lieutenant Geoghegan and his sowars had stayed in and around Mundabad after Nuttall and Blackwood had moved on, and remained there until the artillery bombardment had been going on for some time. Then he saw what he describes as thousands of enemy coming towards him from Khig. There was nothing that he could do about it, as the land between the villages consisted of orchards bounded by walls six or seven feet high and intersected by deep irrigation ditches – quite impracticable for cavalry action, and in any case he had only thirty-eight men with him. So he withdrew on to the rearguard, where he teamed up with Lieutenant E. V. P. Monteith, the senior cavalry officer there at the time. Monteith and his squadron of the Sind Horse had just been rejoined by his troop that had been detached to escort Osborne and his guns to the front. So as soon as Geoghegan put himself under command he felt that he was strong enough to charge the enemy and drive them clear away. He collected his men and Geoghegan's together, and began to form up on the left of Quarry's company. He had just completed his preparations and was about to be off, when his commanding officer, Malcolmson, suddenly appeared, very angry, and peremptorily ordered him back to his place on Quarry's right. What was more, to ensure that he did not get up to any such tricks again, Malcolmson took away one of his troops and gave it to Geoghegan, who was then sent with his reinforced squadron

across the ravine to the front of the baggage with orders to watch for enemy threatening the 66th Foot on the right of the fighting line, and to charge them if they made a sudden rush.

Ghazis and a few irregular horse had entered Mundabad as soon as Geoghegan vacated it, and from there kept up a constant fire on the baggage column, even shooting-up Quarry's company from behind. Others tried to push down the Mundabad Ravine where there were no infantry to stop them, compelling Ready to call on Quarry for twenty men under Second-Lieutenant Bray and to post them on the south side of the ravine, whence they could command it and at the same time prevent Afghan parties from infiltrating from the right rear.

Bray found good firing positions for his men under the cover of old garden walls, and was able to engage the enemy in and about the village of Khig, four hundred yards to his front – he was facing north-east – and also to check small parties trying to ride around his right flank. But the rest of the baggage and its guard were still being subjected to a galling fire from parts of Mundabad which Bray could neither see nor reach, fire to which they could reply to only occasionally as the enemy were well under cover. The only times that they presented a fair mark was when they entered or left their enclosures. After an hour Ready decided that he had had enough of this and took the offensive. He sent Bray forward on the Mundabad side of the ravine to capture the nearest orchards, which he did without difficulty, putting the defenders to flight. At the same time he detached Lieutenant Whitby's Grenadiers and Lieutenant Salmon's Jacob's Rifles company from the right of his V to clear the ravine. They advanced up the bed driving the tribesmen before them, killing a few and considerably hastening the retreat of the others. Then they swung right up the Mundabad side and took the Afghans escaping from Bray in enfilade, sending them fleeing back to Khig. Thus in a few minutes most of the nuisance areas were in British hands and the annoyance had ceased. The troops were jubilant, morale was at a peak. But they had been in their new positions – the defences that Burrows may have meant them to man, but for which he had forgotten to give the necessary orders – for only a quarter of an hour when Malcolmson came

on the scene and insisted that they withdraw to their original ground. Seeing them begin to pull out, the enemy gained courage and the men were subjected to heavy fire while retiring across the open to their old positions. Salmon says, 'It is needless to observe that the enemy not only speedily reoccupied the gardens and enclosures, but, emboldened by our retirement, came in greater numbers, and the fire we were obliged to sustain was proportionately greater; indeed, it was almost a certainty of being hit if any one got up from the ground and moved from place to place. Seeing this, the enemy became even bolder, and we were compelled to repel two very determined attacks which were made on the baggage later on.'

Malcolmson must now have received some orders from Burrows, for he told Ready to leave all the guard detachments in position, but to move the forward element of the baggage column back across the ravine to the Khushk-i-Nakhud side. Some of the shells that had been disturbing Quarry had fallen among the camels, and the local Kandahari drivers obeyed the order with alacrity. When they reached the far side, however, they failed to stop, and deserted in a body, many of them with their camels, streaming away over the plain. The camels left behind became massed in utter confusion from which it was almost impossible to extricate them, and numbers broke away. To save what he could, Malcolmson established a rear baggage guard from a small party of Jacob's Rifles under a native officer. When returning from posting them, he noticed Wali Sher Ali Khan sitting gloomily among his few remaining friends and retainers. No one will ever know what Malcolmson was trying to do. He never seemed to be in the neighbourhood when his subordinates tried to take the initiative. He either came along in time to stop any offensive action, as in the case of Monteith; or to restore the status quo ante after successful enterprise, as with Ready's attack. Perhaps he was husbanding his resources, determined to keep his infantry and cavalry intact and concentrated to stop the Afghans probing through to the transport.

If Burrows meant to withdraw on Mundabad, the time had come when he must do so. He had achieved his aim of inducing Ayub Khan to delay his march on Maiwand and commit his whole army to the battle; and he had inflicted significant casualties on his young opponent's force. But he was faced with a situation where every conceivable advantage had to be exploited to the full if the British column was to survive – let alone win the day – and one calling for the highest skill in commanding a mixed group of infantry, cavalry and artillery. He was very heavily outnumbered and was taking on much greater odds than had Sir Donald Stewart at Ahmad Khel, who had not one single enemy gun ranged against him. The ground on which he stood was useless for defence, there were not even stones large enough for building breastworks, and only the Sappers and Miners had seen fit to dig themselves in. Mundabad would provide much more in the way of natural defences, if he could get back there before he was outflanked and encircled.

Burrows must have realized this, but he stayed where he was on a stretch of blazing hot, open plain deployed on a line which did not even face to the Afghan main strength. He may have become engrossed in infantry regimental battles to the exclusion of all else; and this is a possibility, as he knew something about commanding an infantry regiment, but gave few orders concerning the cavalry and artillery which were not suggested to him by his staff officers. It is more likely that he feared his force lacked the discipline to maintain its cohesion during the intricate process of withdrawing from an enemy in contact. More simply, he dared not move because in his opinion any retrograde step might lead to a panic-stricken rout, as had nearly happened when he had tried to reposition Cole's companies. This is substantiated by Leach, who later in the afternoon suggested that the left of the infantry line should be drawn back still further to present a better front to the enemy; but Burrows told him

about what had happened before and said that he would never dare move those companies again.

He probably was not aware that some of his soldiers were soon to suffer and later become seriously demoralized through lack of water, because the mile of undefended ground between the firing line was open to forays by Afghan horsemen and too dangerous, in their own opinion, for the bhistis. If that had been brought home to him, he must surely have moved his force back to the ample water supplies of the ravine – and, for that matter, to the quarter of a million rounds of small-arms ammunition and five hundred shell and case for E/B's 9-pounders. He could have held out for ever!

Nobody told him that the smooth-bores had been banging away at the enemy all morning, forcing the Afghan cavalry to keep its distance, and using up all their ammunition in the process. There would be very little left to deal with the main assault when it came.

7

It was now nearly one o'clock. The 66th were having no trouble with the Maiwand ghazis, and Jacob's Rifles were still exchanging shots with the Kabulis and ghazis opposite them. But a huge build-up was taking place around the Grenadiers and particularly facing their refused left flank and Cole's two companies, a bristling hedge of flags and banners of all sizes and colours. The Afghan turning movement to Burrows's left rear had been fully developed, swarms of horsemen darting and swooping into the expanse of plain between Nuttall's squadrons and Quarry's company of the baggage guard. Bhistis therefore refused finally to return with water from Mundabad to the line to assuage the men's great thirst brought on by the effort of battle in the blazing sun. Stretcher-bearers could not be made to leave the sanctuary of the ravine to fetch back more of the steadily increasing number of wounded to the field hospital, while those in the regimental aid posts squatted miserably in the reserve areas, per-

forming their duties only under compulsion – which meant that they had to be escorted. The young recruits who had been detailed for ammunition duties could no longer be persuaded to bring ammunition from the ponies to the front, and British officers in both the Grenadiers and Jacob's Rifles were having to take on this task themselves. Burrows's fighting echelon was practically surrounded, hemmed in by a gigantic horseshoe.

The enemy artillery had been excellently handled, and had not been content to remain in any one position. They had taken full advantage of the organized disorder and turmoil of battle to creep forward in bounds and to move around the flanks, making use of covered routes and approaches the very existence of which was unknown to the British. An examination of Afghan artillery wheelmarks during the subsequent survey of the battlefield showed that Ayub Khan's guns had been much closer in the final phases than anyone had imagined, many of them sited to take one part or another of the British line in enfilade.

Infantry casualties were beginning to mount up, the regiments suffering dead and wounded in direct proportion to their lack of cover. The 66th on the right of the line, furthest from the enemy guns and with the dry watercourse to protect them, were almost unscathed; Jacob's Rifles had twenty to thirty casualties, the Grenadiers and Cole's companies probably twice as many, sepoy in the exposed rear areas suffering nearly as much as those in the line. There were also heavy losses among the artillery horses and the cavalry, particularly in Mayne's squadron which was still drawn up mounted and misapplied behind the E/B guns.

It was under these circumstances that orders were given for Fowle's two 12-pounder howitzers to be withdrawn from the left flank and come into action again alongside the rest of the smooth-bore battery – in the same way as Jones had been brought back from the right of the 66th Foot earlier on. Under normal operational circumstances this was a reasonable move; the howitzers had to move back only a couple of hundred yards, from where they could still carry out the same task. Ammunition was beginning to run short and coordination of fire could best be controlled centrally. But there were other considerations which

occurred to nobody, in that this was very nearly the last straw for the sepoys of Cole's companies. Just as the comforting presence of two howitzers with British officers and detachments had been an assurance that they were not alone, so their departure had the opposite effect. Coming into or out of action by artillery is never a leisurely affair. The young Pathans would have noticed the gunners leap to their feet as the teams pulled up beside them in a cloud of dust, the shouts as the gun-trails were hooked to the limbers, the scramble to secure seats on the wagons and the departure at a spanking trot. For near-boys immersed in an incredible nightmare and wishing for nothing better than to leave their place of horror and peril, it made the ordeal even harder to bear to see others on whom they had relied for support leave them for the safety of the rear. It was a pity that this was not appreciated; it was something not unknown to military doctrine. At any rate, it was said that with young infantry it is necessary to have old and steady artillery in the firing line; but the younger the troops, the greater the risk of them losing their heads if that confidence prove to be without foundation. However, these young sepoys of Jacob's Rifles, commanded by a young Englishman whom they scarcely knew, separated from the parent regiment, strangers on their right and nothing but vast hordes of the enemy in front, on their left and behind them, continued to do their duty, though they had little water and had not eaten since the previous evening.

It will be remembered that Burrows had deployed his force on the piece of ground on which Blackwood, actuated purely by the need to bring effective fire down on the enemy, had brought Fowell's two 9-pounder guns into action. The terrain on the left front of this position had been seen by everybody sent to chasten Maclaine, but no one had moved one step to the front or right, as in both directions there seemed to be an unbroken expanse of open plain. This omission was now to be paid for in full.

The Mundabad Ravine runs north-east past the village of that name towards Maiwand, but shortly after Khig a dry tributary swings north almost parallel with the British position, bending in a salient outwards in the direction of the artillery. Its banks are flush with the plain and its course cannot be traced

from the British line, even on a clear day. Currie, with his cavalryman's eye for country, had seen it, and referred to it in his report. 'I had noticed when in the first position that there was a deep nullah [dry water-course] along our front, as, though it was perfectly invisible, the [enemy] cavalry withdrew into it, and the tops of their black caps could be seen moving to the right. When in the final position this nullah was about two hundred and fifty yards to our front, and into it I saw the ghazis streaming, and pointed the occurrence out to General Burrows, as could be seen by their flags moving along to the right.' Lieutenant Lynch of the 66th Foot also describes the way in which the enemy used the nullah. 'There was a deep nullah directly in front of the 66th Regiment and Jacob's Rifles. The enemy's guns moved along it protected perfectly from our fire, and placed their guns in every advantageous position. My reason for knowing that there was a nullah in front is that two of the enemy's guns suddenly appeared which we did not see before; they were evidently loaded previously, and opened fire on us. They were about two hundred yards from our line. I saw the horses taken out (six under each gun) and disappear again in the hollow.' Leach amplifies and continues the story. 'Under cover of the sheltering banks at the salient angle formed by the fatal ravine, two 6-pounder guns were brought to bear on our line at a distance of less than five hundred yards, and almost enfilading it. Hidden breast-high, the men serving them were distinctly visible; but notwithstanding a fire opened upon them by the left company of the 66th, and the efforts of our guns, the Afghans held their ground and our losses became serious.'

The distance of these guns from the British line has been in dispute ever since the day of the battle. Burrows made it to be seven hundred yards from the centre of his line; Blackwood gave a range of five hundred yards to his guns; officers of Jacob's Rifles and the Grenadiers all gave estimates of between five hundred and six hundred yards. The map made from a sketch produced by Lieutenant Talbot after his visit to the battlefield two months later, but drawn by Leach, shows a distance of five hundred and fifty yards from the centre of the E/B position to the enemy guns in the nullah. The figure even

increased with time, rising to as much as eight hundred yards.

Once, when the smoke had cleared away momentarily, Captain Harrison of Jacob's Rifles saw a body of men in dark clothing kneeling near one of the guns 'about six hundred yards off' firing volleys, and he told his men to engage them. Anderson of the Grenadiers also saw these enemy infantrymen crouching by their artillery, correctly identified them as regular Kabulis and threw back his right company so as to bring a direct fire upon them – but the cover that they were under was so good that they did not sustain much loss. With them were many ghazis in white, all comfortably protected by the banks of the nullah. Currie wanted to rush it and massacre the inhabitants, claiming that the troops sent to occupy it would have been quite safe from all fire, and could ultimately have effected an orderly retreat to their jumping-off place. So did Captain McMath, Lynch's company commander, but both he and Currie thought the distance to the nullah was only two hundred to two hundred and fifty yards. The weight of opinion was against them, and Burrows, having failed to advance the Grenadiers five hundred yards, did not see fit to countenance another similar or, in his estimation, even longer excursion.

A later chapter describes a visit to Maiwand in recent years. Let it suffice to say at the moment that Currie and Lynch were correct. The distance from the lip of the nullah salient to the centre of the E/B gun position is approximately two hundred and seventy-five yards. The configuration of the ground is such that from the Afghan viewpoint the guns, the cavalry and the Grenadiers would have been clearly and completely silhouetted on a flat horizon against the skyline except when obscured by smoke – almost impossible to miss. The Maiwand, or eastern, bank of the nullah is lower than the western side, which was nearer to the British line, so the Afghan gunners and riflemen needed to expose only those portions of themselves and their weapons as was necessary to aim and fire; after doing so, they could duck down again. Presenting so small a target, it is not surprising that Blackwood's shells, fired at double the correct range, should have flown screaming over their heads and that

the rifle volleys should have done the same. Jacob's Rifles were accused for the next ninety years of having fired too high!

From the subsequent analysis of wheel-tracks the two guns in the salient were identified as having been 3-pounders, not 6-pounders as postulated by Leach; but there were eight Afghan 6-pounders deployed along the nullah not much further to the north. In summary it can be said that between half-past one and two o'clock the British centre, an easy target, was being engaged by ten enemy guns at ranges of between three hundred and six hundred yards. The Grenadiers on the left were clearly visible and could be fired on by every enemy gun.

8

At half-past one the smooth-bore battery ran out of ammunition. The rest of their battle-supply was at the bottom of the Helmand River near Girishk, abandoned through lack of transport. Captain Slade was convinced that there was more in the wagons with the baggage at Mundabad, but found it impossible to get it up – he sent three officers in succession to fetch it and none of them was able to find any. So he took the extraordinary step of ordering his whole battery to go back and collect what there was, if any, and then to come forward into action again on the left flank. This withdrawal had what has since been claimed to have been a fatal effect on the native troops, even Mayne's men beginning to murmur among themselves. Heavily outnumbered, fighting under a deadly sun in what were now dreadful conditions of thirst and heat, rifles too hot to hold and with metal distorted, the sepoys suddenly saw half their British-manned artillery leaving them, displaying every degree of urgency in so doing, never to return. They were not to know that Fowle discovered a few rounds of ammunition and came trotting back; only to be compelled to drop trails and come into action against a band of Afghan cavalry who disputed his passage before he got half-way to the line. Soon his detachments of

infantrymen were plying their real trade and using their rifles to keep the foe from over-running the howitzers.

The boost to Afghan morale, on the other hand, was terrific; they exulted when they saw half the feared British artillery leaving the battlefield. At Ayub Khan's orders his own artillery fire was doubled in intensity, and a hail of metal poured into the British position. Fowell described what it was like before he was wounded and sent away. 'Their artillery was extremely well served. Their guns took us in the flank as well as directly, and their fire was concentrated. We were completely outmatched; and although we continued to fire steadily, our guns seemed completely unable to silence theirs. Their Armstrong guns threw heavier shells than ours, and their smooth-bore guns had great range and accuracy, and caused great damage, especially among our horses and limbers.'

Slade took over Fowell's guns, but then had to assume command of the whole of E/B, as Blackwood was seriously wounded in the thigh. He left Slade in charge and went off for a dressing, leading his horse and trying to staunch the wound with his handkerchief. Later he returned, but only to say that he was too unfit to take back his battery.

Mayne and his squadron of the 3rd Light Cavalry had been in almost the same place ever since the beginning of the battle. He had escorted Blackwood to his final position and formed up to his right rear; and except for moving one troop to the left of Osborne's guns when they came in, there he stayed – mounted, outlined against the sky, a perfect target for both aimed rounds and for 'overs' which missed the guns. He started to lose horses as soon as the Afghan artillery opened fire and had already lost horses and men by the time that the infantry came into the line. After that he expected to be relieved and sent somewhere to be useful, as his escort duties should have ended with the arrival of the infantry regiments, but no orders came. Nuttall was far away on the left, and Currie had no influence with Burrows – who was in any case engrossed with the Grenadiers. Not only were his numbers being reduced at an alarming rate while employed in this Aunt Sally role, but his presence was not even welcome! Harris was worried that shots designed for the squadron might

fly through and cause damage among the ranks of the 66th, and asked him to go away.

Mayne saw Blackwood wounded and continuing to work his guns until he could do no more. By this time he himself had been hit twice, but the wounds were only slight. Sowars and horses were dropping continually all around him, men lying where they fell or staggering to the aid post, badly wounded horses put out of their misery or led limping painfully to the rear by their distressed owners. When a full third of his horses had gone, and he had been standing for nearly three hours under a withering fire, Mayne broke tradition and *asked*! He saw Heath not far off, and rode over to tell him what he thought. And to some effect! Heath went off to see Burrows and returned to tell Mayne that he could withdraw from where he was, and go to whichever flank needed him most. One might have expected more specific orders from a force commander, who should have known the best place to use a squadron, or, rather, the remaining two-thirds of a squadron, of cavalry. However, Mayne was content. His men were still perfectly steady in spite of their trying ordeal and he took them back in good order to the right of the 66th Foot. But they obviously had the ghazis well in hand. So, seeing the smooth-bores pass by on their way to the rear, Mayne decided to move over to the left flank, as he heard that it was under severe pressure. While on the way he saw some of the enemy cavalry who had infiltrated between the front line and the baggage harrying one unfortunate man on foot. He sent eight troopers to the rescue at the gallop, whereupon the enemy turned tail and fled, and he found that he had saved the life of gallant Surgeon Kirtikar of Jacob's Rifles, returning alone after escorting wounded from the line to the field hospital at Mundabad. Arriving on the left flank he found that a horde of ghazis with masses of cavalry behind them were beginning to press very close. A. M. Monteith's and Reid's sowars were partly dismounted, engaging the hostile force with carbine fire, so Mayne took post on their right, dismounted half his squadron – reduced by now to the strength of a weak troop – and did likewise. The ghazis were at less than three hundred yards range and he succeeded in dropping a good many. They fired back,

but his squadron was now at last under some form of cover in a small nullah and suffered no losses.

The cavalry opposite the Grenadiers had also come within rifle-range for the first time, and this was when Leach suggested to Burrows that he pull back Cole's companies to present a better front to the enemy, but was told of the previous débâcle. So Leach, who knew some of the men, dismounted and helped Cole to begin firing disciplined volleys. They were partially successful, but it was only too clear that the men were unsteady. Many of them made little or no use of their rifles, and others, falling out under some pretext, remained in the rear far longer than was necessary.

Returning to the left, Smith and his squadron were still behind A. M. Monteith and Reid, suffering losses in men and horses and waiting for instructions; and now some orders were on the way for action on the other flank. A group of about a hundred ghazis who had been cautiously holding back had seen the smooth-bores leave the field, then saw Mayne arrive on the right and depart again. Encouraged by all this, and following their natural instinct to follow up a retreating enemy, they began to press in behind the 66th. Nuttall was able to see this happening and decided that the time had come for a cavalry charge to restore the situation. The troop of 3rd Light Cavalry under its native officer was still on that side, but not strong enough to take action on its own, so he ordered Smith to turn about and join them. But these were no longer the sowars who had routed the Afghans at Khushk-i-Nakhud and charged for the Wali's guns at Girishk. They had been reduced by heat-exhaustion and trauma to a semi-dazed condition, brought on by hours of inaction and passive acceptance of casualties. They were not receptive to change from the static role that they had been playing for so long. There was difficulty in making the men put away their carbines and draw their sabres. But Hogg was there. He grabbed Lieutenant Owen, an ex-3rd King's Own Hussars officer and now adjutant of the 3rd Light Cavalry, who was passing by with a message, and put him in charge of his regiment's troop. He then turned the full force of his own aggressive personality to calling Smith's squadron to order. There was an

immediate change. The line was formed, sabres flashed in the sun, Smith and Owen put themselves at the head of their men. A trumpet sounded. Hogg watched grimly as the trot broke into a canter. The men were really set to go.

Then occurred the last thing that anyone would have expected to happen – after all this preparation, organization and morale-building, with the charge about to break into a galloping thunderbolt of long-delayed retribution, Nuttall changed his mind and shouted an order to halt and return. Somebody had reminded him, or he had suddenly thought, of the dry water-course along the top end of which the 66th were in action, and which lay deep across the path of the charge, sufficient possibly to break it at the crucial moment. The charge had not begun to gallop, when it would have been irretrievable, and Nuttall must have galloped forward, or they would never have heard him. As it was, they got to within a hundred yards of the enemy before they were pulled up in confusion. They withdrew to the accompaniment of bullets and jeers from the ghazis, who now came on more confidently than before.

9

It was now two o'clock, and Ayub Khan seemed to be closing in for the kill. He had been allowed a whole three hours to move his forces in their own time into the positions which he had planned from the beginning. Nobody had interfered with him, and his creaky command structure had achieved its aim in the slow, traditional, oriental way. He was ready to pounce. The Afghan army was poised in the shape of a gigantic crescent coming slowly but surely in towards the British fighting echelon, its horns gradually pinching in between the firing line and the baggage. And from these very horns, elements were now flaking off and turning their attention to the transport, or roaming the barren ground dividing the two portions of the Burrows column. Down at Mundabad, Ready had taken charge on the Maiwand flank where Bray, Salmon and Whitby were being faced with

more and more tribesmen sniping at them from the orchards of Khig and Mundabad, and trying always to force a way down the ravine. On the other side Quarry was continually engaged with hostile horsemen, offshoots of the myriads confronting Nuttall on the left of the fighting line. There were even a few predatory bandits hovering on the plain between the baggage and Khushki-Nakhud, waiting for an opportunity to dash in and seize their prey.

Nuttall now had all the 3rd Light Cavalry with him, less Geoghegan, and also A. M. Monteith's and Smith's squadrons of the Sind Horse – a composite body unused to working together. Even at the expense of accepting one less squadron, a full regiment with its own commanding officer would have been preferable. Moreover, there were by no means as many troopers in the squadrons as had taken up their positions that morning. One in five of the sowars had been dragged dead, dying or wounded to the rear, where bodies lay unheeded – lonely, forlorn, khaki heaps blending with the light-brown surface of the plain. Some lucky ones had passed through Surgeon Street's hands and been sent on, with wounds dressed, to the field hospital. Smith and Owen were still trying to get their men back into some form of order after their aborted charge. Hogg was helping them, but many of the sowars had sheathed their sabres and got their carbines out again – a measure of how threatening the enemy had become. The Afghans were no longer to be restrained; doubtful and wary though they were, nevertheless on they came, slowly and cautiously but at ever increasing pace. Mayne's men alone knocked many an Afghan horseman from his saddle, but it was not enough. The orders had been given; the great group soul of the tribesman had been awakened in all its rage and power; the trap would close its jaws. The prize was too great and too near to consider any longer the dread payment that must be made.

The battlefield was a shambles. The guns had been in action more or less without cease for over three hours and had fired a thousand shells. The infantry had been in the line for two hours in the roasting heat, battered by waves of concussion from their own gunfire, and for the last half-hour subjected to a holocaust

of round-shot and bursting shell from enemy guns which had crept up unseen and unscathed to a killing range.

The Grenadier group had suffered most, although they had managed to keep their adversaries further away than had Nuttall's troops – the Snider rifles, red-hot to the touch though they might have been, had a longer effective range than carbines. But even so, the Afghan regular infantry had regained their nerve, and were only six hundred yards away. Their dark flood was seeping forward remorselessly, suffering the penalty as it came, but relentlessly pressing in. With them were seething masses of ghazis, so many that the vast, surging horde seemed to Monteith to be a mile deep! Both Grenadier wings had been thrown back, the regiment faced in three different directions yet every portion of it was enfiladed by some battery of the Kizilbash artillery, which took full advantage of their plight and the perfect target they presented. As the smooth-bore battery had gone, a third of the Afghan guns could not be engaged, except by Maclaine's division and then only by firing over the heads of the Grenadiers. As a result the Grenadiers got no more artillery support, while among them lay in bloody carnage nearly a hundred dead or seriously wounded sepoy, and another seventy-five wounded had been evacuated to the ravine. With the dead lay the remains of young Cole, smashed into oblivion by a cannon-ball; his two senior native officers had also fallen, leaving in command of the two companies a single jemadar – the most junior grade of native officer. Yet he kept his men from wavering, his bruised ranks from crumbling into chaos. As in trances, hypnotized by sheer numbers, seventy Jacob's Rifles sepoy of the hundred who had taken the field that morning maintained their line. They contemplated, together with the surviving two-thirds of the Grenadiers, a looming host of twelve thousand foemen as the battle reached its climax.

They were not alone in their grief. For the last half-hour the enemy cannonade had increased in volume with every minute that passed, as more guns came up into their final assault positions, and even musket-fire had taken its toll. In the centre Heath had fallen, shot dead at his brigadier-general's side. Harris had gone with his wound to the rear, so only Leach survived from

Burrows's original staff. Among the gunners, Blackwood had abdicated command and was sitting behind the 66th helping them to judge ranges; Fowell had continued to serve his division, albeit severely wounded, until put on his horse by Slade and ordered officially to the rear. A quarter of the Royal Horse Artillery battery were dead or wounded, as were over half of their horses. Jacob's Rifles had lost over a fifth of their line and rear echelon, the latter having less cover than the fighting soldiers. But they stood firm, raked by shell and musket-fire. Below them in the dip the 66th had nothing to worry about. They had good cover provided by the water-course, which served to minimize their losses; and the enemy artillery was mostly employed on more immediate and much more profitable tasks. There were only two guns to bother them – the 3-pounders in the nullah on their left front. So, altogether, only about fifteen men had been put out of action, wounded or killed. In C Company there was but a single casualty, one man wounded. But now, around these two Afghan guns three hundred yards to their south lay ghazis, battle-fury climbing to a reckless peak, five thousand blood-thirsty tribesmen supported by regular Kabuli soldiers and at the same time more ghazis in the left horn of Ayub Khan's crescent probed aggressively inward in the wake of Smith's and Owen's wrecked cavalry charge.

Pounded and buffeted, Burrows's sepoy lifted searing-hot rifles with blistered hands to fire and fire again at the threatening masses approaching nearer and nearer, burnt fingers fumbling in pouches for dwindling supplies of ammunition, every enemy knocked down replaced by five more. Officers peered red-eyed through the smoke, watching the inexorable advance, calmly and confidently encouraging the men, wondering how much longer it would be before bayonets were fixed and the battle resolved into a writhing maelstrom of thrust and slash.

Slowly to their dulled and tortured senses came a feeling of change. There was a difference, a slight alleviation, a concept of transient well-being. Gradually realization dawned. The deadly bombardment which had been hurling shot after shot, shell after shell through the steadfast ranks was losing its vigour, becoming weaker, dying down – a few sporadic outbursts, then the rage of

battle sank to a broody grumble. Burrows thought at once that the Kizilbash artillery had run out of ammunition; so did many others. They had not forgotten the smooth-bores; they were only too aware that guns could use up their shells. Flagging spirits revived and hope was born again with the thought that the long drawn-out ordeal might soon be over. All were sure of their ability to withstand an enemy who had no artillery support. Perhaps the prospect of defeat had receded after all.

There was a respite, a few minutes to think sanely. Grant of the Grenadiers had managed to remain with his men throughout the battle despite his leg-wound. The bone was exposed for about an inch, but it was not broken. He was on foot, as his charger had been killed by a round shot straight through the body, and he himself had been hit again in the stomach by a spent ball; but he was still around, seeing that the rifle sights were altered as the enemy drew nearer, and bringing up more ammunition from the ponies who were fifteen to twenty yards in rear of the line. Now, while hobbling about issuing bullets and cartridges, he had time to notice how many dead men lay in the ranks among the living; in the general dust and blood with which everyone was covered he had not had time to absorb this fact before. On the Grenadiers' right, a bullet had struck Lieutenant Aslett's helmet, turning it completely around, and another had ricocheted from his sword hilt to kill a man at his side, leaving him unhurt. He, too, was having problems. The seventy rounds in the men's pouches had quickly been expended, and now the first reserve was nearly finished. The firing had been so rapid and continuous that rifles were almost too hot to hold and the mechanism was not working properly. The bandsmen who had been told off to supply the fighting line were not able to keep up with the demand, so he had taken this duty on himself in addition to his other tasks. What Cole's almost leaderless companies were doing for ammunition, heaven knows! He was dead, there was only one native officer left alive, so there may have been no one to take charge of replenishment – which would have had to be fetched from Jacob's Rifles' rear echelon four hundred yards off across ground open to the enemy. It is highly probable that some of the men had run out completely.

In the main body of Jacob's Rifles nearly every man had expended his original allotment and replenishment had been made as quickly as possible, but not fast enough. Harrison had suffered most of his casualties through sending men back for more supplies, as the recruit ammunition numbers refused to move, and the rear echelon was in the open. He handled some of the rifles himself, and they were so hot that the men had wrapped cartridge paper around the metal so as to be able to hold them. He went to the ammunition ponies, unloaded some boxes and began to open them.

The 66th, despite the fact that their rifles had a faster rate of fire, and therefore a greater rate of expenditure, appear to have been well served, and no writer has any complaint on this score.

Also taking advantage of the unnatural pause, surgeons and their staffs in the regimental aid posts two to three hundred yards behind were busily doing what they could. Kirtikar had returned from his nearly disastrous journey back from the field hospital, and had rejoined his staff. For a time it had been impossible to carry out any regular surgical work as the aid post had been under musket fire as well as shelling. Now that the latter, at least, had abated he gave the wounded what help he could, helped by 2nd Class Hospital Assistant Madhowrao Vithal; and by Passed Medical Pupil Narsoo Parasharam, who had been hit in the stomach by a spent cannon-ball yet still carried on. Surgeon Dane of the Grenadiers was working in his aid post when the Reverend Mr Cane, whom we last met as a member of Brooke's mess in Kandahar, came up to say that there were a number of wounded men lying close to the fighting line, and implored him to come right forward and do something for them. So Dane collected two of his assistants and some stretchers, and went with the padre to a slight depression in the ground two hundred yards behind and to the right of the regiment, in which lay fifteen to twenty Grenadier sepoy and a few European gunners, all of them severely wounded. He started to do what he could for them, and to put them on stretchers for evacuation. They were the lucky ones – scattered over the field were forty other seriously wounded men, and there were no stretchers for them;

the bearers had not come back from the ravine. If the line were to be overrun they would have no chance.

10

But the Afghan artillery had not ceased firing from lack of shell and ball. The cannonade had slackened because Ayub Khan was about to give the signal for an advance on all fronts, and he did not want the guns firing through their own attacking foot-soldiers.

Opposite the 66th Foot and Jacob's Rifles, mounted Afghan leaders suddenly appeared on the British side of the nullah salient, wheeling, circling, cavorting, cheering on their men to the assault, while ghazis rose time and time again only to be driven back by the deadly volleys of the Martini-Henry rifles. But they had reached a peak of wild euphoria and were not to be denied. As if sluices had been opened from some great dam, the raging torrents of screaming tribesmen poured forward, a rushing tempest of fury, surging on to desperate encounter. Rising from the salient in savage thousands they charged to the attack. Ghazis in their white robes, wild-eyed and howling their war-cries of 'Allah! Bismullah!', right arms with swords extended, shield-arms held from habit across the body for useless protection against rifle-bullets, dark-uniformed Kabulis plodding forward in line, on they came. The 66th mowed them down in their hundreds – an eye-witness said he thought that no living body of men could survive such a fire, and expected to see them break at any instant – but nothing stopped them. Flags, standards, banners – they streamed on high, they covered the ground – officers and chieftains, sabres and knives, leading a huge twenty-deep phalanx of warriors, a tangled trail of dead and wounded heaped and agonized in their wake. Only human, they flinched at last from the disciplined fire of the 66th. They swerved to the right, across the front of Jacob's Rifles, and headed straight for the guns.

Anderson of the Grenadiers, preoccupied though he was with his own battle, saw them coming and wheeled his right company

back still more to face them and protect the battery, his men firing steadily and well. But as he did so, there arose the roar of another ghazi charge on his own regiment's front and left. Again, a line of waving standards had risen aloft and was being escorted forward by a fanatic mob of white-clad ghazis, followed by sombre cohorts of Herati infantry. Undeterred by company volleys, on they came, screaming their battle-slogans, dauntless and determined.

It was too much for Cole's companies. A youth must have turned and started to run. A few followed. In an instant a terrified, disorganized rabble was streaming to the rear, carrying with it the cursing old soldiers and non-commissioned officers who had succeeded for so long in maintaining the line.

Something would have had to give way in the end, and the sorely tried young Pathans of the left flank were predictably the first to break. Unfortunately they set off a chain-reaction; seeing what had happened, one of the inside companies of the Grenadier left-wing stood up, broke formation, and began to press back towards the rear. Aslett, who had left them to get ammunition, ran back to make them front and form line again like the rest of the regiment, but they would not, and began to force their way in to the back of the right wing. Anderson knew that he must form company squares, the expedient which had saved the day at Ahmad Khel, but in the heat of the crisis his adjutant shouted the orders for making a regimental square; and the native officers followed suit with the correct drill-book orders for forming a square from line. With three companies thrown back, two on one wing, one on the other, this resulted in the most hopeless confusion, accentuated by the left wing companies driving in amongst those on the right who were trying to make something out of their orders. The sepoys stood irresolute, tightly packed ten-deep, the right refusing to give ground, the left pressing hard upon them. In company squares, or given even a short time to manœuvre, and the day might yet have been saved by the determination of the right wing, but now it was too late.

Flushed with success, the tribesmen charged into the rear ranks of the Grenadiers, who were so close packed that the men

could not use their arms, and defence was hopeless. They reached over the sepoys' bayonets and cut them down, and began pulling men out of the ranks into the open to hack them to pieces with more elbow-room for their long Khyber knives. The indifference of the soldiers to death was extraordinary; they were in shock, mentally at a standstill, and numbers were cut down as they stood without a struggle. However, this served in the end to relieve the pressure, and some began to emerge from their apathy, enough to start bayoneting the enemy in their midst. They still paid no attention to their officers, and started a slow drift to their right rear, driving in front of them some disconcerted Afghans who had swarmed around their erstwhile back.

Burrows came galloping up to try and rally the Grenadiers, and while he was so employed Leach asked to be allowed to take an order to Nuttall for the cavalry to charge and retrieve the failing fortunes of the day. Receiving a reply in the affirmative, he rode off at all speed to deliver the message.

Worse was to come. Seeing Cole's companies running past them in full flight, probably crying that all was lost, the other two companies of Iredell's wing rose also to their feet and started to fall back from their position between Fowell's and Osborne's divisions. Momentarily they obeyed Iredell's and Harrison's orders to get back in their places, then they broke and crowded on the right wing of their regiment, Jacob's Rifles.

The Royal Horse Artillery guns were sweeping the ground before them with murderous fire of canister-shot, but nothing was going to stop the ghazi rush now that it was in full momentum, a yelling, dedicated mob. Slade saw the infantry deserting him on all sides, and had no choice. He had to get his guns away before they fell into enemy hands. He shouted orders for the guns to limber up and retire, and led the centre division out himself. As he went he called out to Henn that the fight was over, and saw the indomitable Sappers and Miners rise to fire three last volleys into the faces of their foes, and then slowly and steadily come away. Osborne passed the orders to his division, but there were so few survivors from the original detachments that he dismounted to help them limber up and come out

of action. Before he could mount again, an Afghan shot him dead – but his guns galloped away to safety. MacLaine either did not hear the order to retire, which is unlikely, or knew better and still hoped to stem the rush and save the day. He fired his last round of case-shot when the enemy were but twenty yards from his gun-muzzles, and then tried to hook-in and go. It was too late. The ghazis flooded over the position, slashing and thrusting, hacking at the men. Gunners fought back furiously with handspikes and sponge-rods, anything that they could find. A limber came up, but the drivers were dragged struggling from their horses and slaughtered on the ground, while the team galloped masterless and riderless to the rear without its gun. MacLaine, himself slightly wounded, saw that the other gun had been overrun and that there was no hope of recovering it, so decided at least to save the team. But just before it left, the Number One, Sergeant Patrick Mullane, charged back in rage among the ghazis, who recoiled before his fury. He managed to grab a wounded driver from under the very knives of the tribesmen, and to carry him back and put him on the limber. They galloped away to rejoin the battery, leaving the ghazis and Kabuli infantry standing proudly around two 9-pounder guns of the Royal Horse Artillery.

There was still a faint hope of recovering them. Captain Beresford-Pierse, commanding the left company of the 66th Foot, had seen their plight and turned the rear rank of his left half-company about to fire volleys at the captors. But almost at once numbers of sepoy from Jacob's Rifles came crowding in among his men and threw them into complete chaos. So there was nothing more that could be done by the infantry.

Leach galloped up to Nuttall, shouting as he reined in his horse that Burrows said he must charge at once. Nuttall replied, reasonably enough, 'Where am I to charge?' Leach had no specific orders in this respect, but he knew the situation and pointed in the direction of the captured guns, which were clearly visible to the left of the amorphous mass of retreating Grenadiers about six hundred yards away. Nuttall had been expecting some sort of orders to arrive fairly soon, and had already ordered the sowars who had been using their carbines from the ground to

remount, return firearms to their buckets and draw sabres. They had been thrown into some confusion when the guns came galloping through their lines, and there were fleeing sepoy all over the place, but they had to some extent managed to reform their ranks. They were still facing outward towards a slowly and cautiously advancing enemy, but now Nuttall drew his sword and wheeled them about for a charge, outnumbered and more than decimated though they were. Owen fell dead, but the other officers were ready. Mayne was on the left with the survivors from his squadron; on the right was A. M. Monteith with thirty of his fifty sowars still in the saddle; behind them waited Reid and Smith. They now had their horses' tails to the enemy, who were within fifty yards and could have dashed in and hamstringed every horse if some brave spirit had set the example. But they had suffered so severely at the hands of these cavalymen that they held back before beginning to close in hesitantly upon them.

Nuttall took post in front, with Hogg on his left. Beside Hogg was Leach, who had no intention of being a spectator. Then away went the charge with a scream of trumpets – and after them came the Afghan cavalry, quite unable to resist the urge to chase after a flying enemy, the better-mounted catching up and thrusting in among the rear files, slashing at their backs.

There was now a very unfortunate misunderstanding. If Currie's story is correct. Nuttall, who was in the lead, decided not to charge home at the head of the men, but to sheer off to the right and 'clear the front', assuming that the sowars would all carry straight on. Mayne galloped on, and the left half of his squadron followed after him perfectly confidently; but the right half thought that they were supposed to follow their brigadier-general, and did so, thereby barging across Monteith's men when almost in reach of the enemy and thoroughly breaking up that part of the charge. Everybody swerved to the right, almost trampling the Grenadiers, but killing any Afghans who happened to be in their path. Monteith was struck by a blow on the head, but clung semi-conscious to the front-arch of his saddle until he came to his senses again. When he did so, quite some minutes later, he found that everything seemed to be under control. His troop was around him, twenty of the sowars able

to show bloodied sabres, leaving the battlefield at a walk with the rest of the Sind Horse, led by Nuttall.

Mayne had charged on, following the original line, and got in among ghazis swarming around the rear of the Grenadiers, breaking their formation, cutting them down and giving the Grenadiers an opportunity to reform. He penetrated through to the far side of the Grenadiers, then, seeing that the rest of the cavalry had wheeled to the right, he did likewise, dispersing any Afghans in his way. Hogg and Leach soon found themselves doing a spirited two-man charge against most of Ayub Khan's army, but managed to extricate themselves after some hard hand-to-hand sabre fighting. Leach's horse was wounded, but apart from that they were so lucky as to be unhurt.

Great numbers of sepoy from the two native regiments now pushed themselves into the rear ranks of the 66th, and nothing could stop them. The combined pressure was so strong that the British regiment was forced forward out of line, an unforeseen development which caused much consternation among the hordes of tribesmen facing them, who fled precipitately.

After a few minutes Burrows gave up for the time being his desperate attempts to rally the native infantry, and galloped over with his escort to the cavalry, who were moving off the field at a walk, half a mile to the original left. According to his statement, 'The first regiment I came to was the 3rd Light Cavalry, and I ordered Major Currie to charge across the front and clear the ground of the ghazis. There was no response; and seeing General Nuttall retiring with the Sind Horse further on, I went to him and called on him to charge and save the infantry. I added that it was our only hope. General Nuttall replied that he could not, the men were out of hand. All was now over, and I galloped back to the infantry to see what might be done to save them from annihilation.'

The soldiers in the baggage area had watched the battle north of them raging with great fury. Owing to the dust and smoke, they were unable to form any accurate idea of what was taking place, but they could see the belching smoke of infantry volleys, the continual flash and impact of the enemy's shell and round-shot, and the mounted cavalry looming through the murk, out-

lined against the sky. They could judge the effectiveness of the Afghan artillery from the sad stream of horses being led wounded to the rear, struck mostly by cannon-ball. Many wounded officers and men had also been carried back to the field hospital before the stretcher-bearers reached the stage when they would no longer return to the line, while no men could be spared from the baggage guard to force them back under escort. From that time on, the majority of the seriously wounded had been left to die on the battlefield.

Geoghegan was standing-by with his squadron, ready to charge if need be, but the fire of the 66th seemed to be holding the ghazi masses. Suddenly he saw a team of artillery horses galloping towards him from the fighting line, riderless, and with no gun towed behind them. Almost immediately afterwards four guns of E/B passed him on their way to the rear, and a trumpeter told him that two guns had been lost and the gunners killed. Malcolmson heard, and shouted to Geoghegan to take his squadron up at once and do what he could, so the young officer headed for the front at all speed, passing on his way numbers of infantry retreating in confusion. He reached Nuttall just as the brigadier-general was forming up for his charge, and wheeled into line with the rest. As he did so, a cannon-ball took off his charger's near-foreleg, and they were both knocked to the ground. When he recovered and got to his feet, the cavalry and, fortunately, their pursuers had all gone, and he was left behind. He was still lucky, as when he was making his way on foot to the rear as best he could, he was met by Owen's groom. The syce knew Geoghegan well, and insisted on giving him his dead master's horse, and in this way he was remounted and enabled to rejoin his own men at the Mundabad Ravine.

E. V. P. Monteith had been told to follow three hundred yards behind Geoghegan, and the men were going splendidly when he saw the squadrons ahead pull up and come about. When he reached them, he was met by Malcolmson who ordered him to retire in conformity, denying him any chance of action on the plain of Maiwand.

Salmon and his sepoy at Mundabad had been watching the progress of the battle, when all of a sudden it seemed to them

that the fighting line had risen, formed line and charged. They could not see as far as the centre, but they saw a large body of ghazis on the right being driven like a wave before the bayonets of the 66th. Thinking that a successful charge had been made, the sepoy broke into excited cheering. But then they fell into puzzled silence. The line moved more to the right, instead of to the immediate front, and they began to suspect that something had gone wrong. It was not until they saw the whole of the infantry disappear into the villages that they realized the extent of the misfortune that had befallen the Girishk column.

CHAPTER 8

Withdrawal from the Field

1

IT WAS NEARLY three o'clock. The 66th Foot, Jacob's Rifles and those Grenadiers who had pushed in among their ranks stood hesitant in a mingled mass of all three regiments until a voice cried, 'Let's try that village over there!', and they began to trudge dazedly towards Khig. To quote from Surgeon Kirtikar, 'Men of all regiments seemed to deliberately walk, turn around and fire, and walk again in the direction of the rear. Running at this time was a physical impossibility. What with the fatigue of three hours' march in the morning, added to over four hours exposure to a heavy fire under a blazing sun, the heat of which was intensified by the barren, stony, open plain on which the men had stood fighting without food or water, it was utterly beyond human energy to run, mobbed as they were by hundreds of the enemy.'

The remainder of the Grenadiers retreated towards Mundabad. Anderson had been hit in several places by shell splinters, and had become embroiled with some ghazis, from whose clutches he had been rescued by Dhokal Singh of the 3rd Light Cavalry. The risaldar had summoned one of the Grenadier havildars and four men, who found him a stretcher and themselves carried him across the ravine, protecting him on the way. Griffiths, the second in command of the regiment, had gone ahead with two hundred men and joined the baggage guard at Mundabad; but his sepoy, except for a very few, were now thoroughly demoralized and made off in small groups across the plain towards Khushk-i-Nakhud. Anderson was highly incensed because Griffiths had taken his water-bottle to fill, and never brought it back!

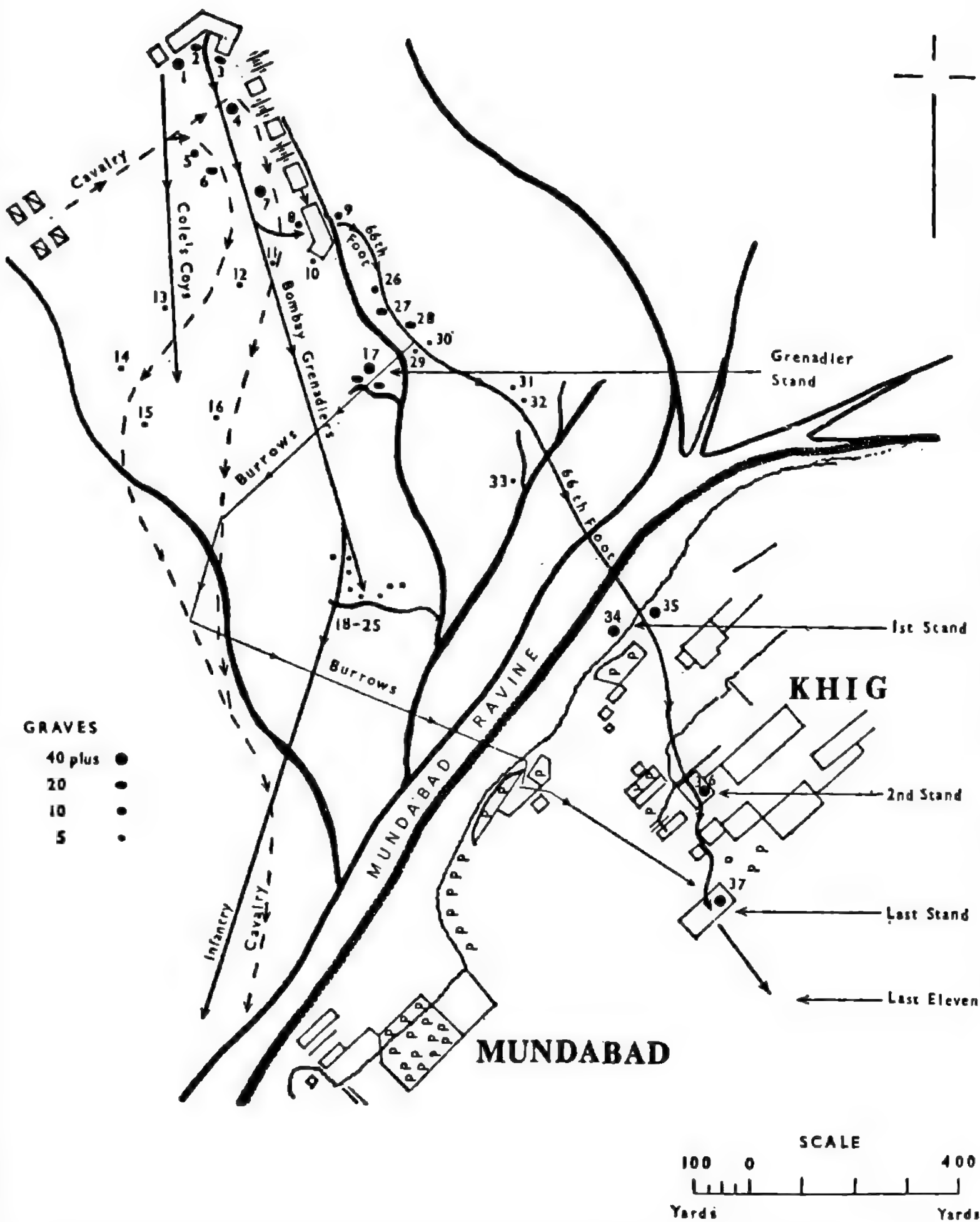
Slade had galloped back from the firing line and brought his

surviving four guns into action north of the ravine, facing right, almost in the same place where Blackwood had chosen his first position of the day. He shouted for his ammunition echelon, the wagons came up as fast as they could, and the gun-limbers were refilled from the wagon bodies. Each 9-pounder had fired one hundred and twenty rounds – twice as much as the smooth-bores. He then carried on across the ravine and came into action to cover the retreat, which was in danger of becoming a rout. He was joined by Faunce and Jones with their 6-pounder smooth-bore guns, who had come out of action when they saw E/B pass to the rear; and also by Fowle, who was the last of the artillery to leave the field in safety.

The cavalry had become very mixed up after their charge, and their officers had done well to keep most of them together and persuade them to stay at a walking pace. Mayne had found that his sowars had stuck to him well, so much so that he thought it might be worth while trying to form them up on the enemy side of the ravine to have another go at the Afghans; but they began handling their carbines again and were no longer in any mood to charge. He saw Nuttall riding up the other side of the ravine, leaving Mundabad on his left, so went to report to him, and received orders to form up by the guns. Some troopers had already disappeared in a cloud of dust, and others followed them, but the majority stopped behind the artillery and were reformed by their officers, squadrons coming under the direct command of their own regimental commanders for the first time that day.

There was now a complete and hopeless separation between the bulk of the infantry, including the 66th, who had withdrawn on Khig, and the cavalry brigade at Mundabad, under Nuttall. Burrows had ridden over to Khig after failing with his appeal to the cavalry for another charge, and there was no contact between the two brigadier-generals, nor any arrangements for mutual assistance. There was even the usual troops' rumour that Burrows had been killed, stemming from his horse having been killed under him. But a badly wounded trooper from the 3rd Light Cavalry, Sowar Burmadeen, had insisted that the General-Sahib take his horse. So Burrows was mobile again, and it is good to know that Burmadeen somehow managed to get

WITHDRAWAL FROM THE FIELD OF MAIWAND



back to Kandahar. Leach had lost Burrows during the diversion of the cavalry charge, and was not to see him again until he rejoined the Mundabad group an hour later. This time he was riding pillion behind a native officer of the Sind Horse, having given his own mount to Major Iredell, seriously wounded during the retreat.

Captain Quarry's half-company of the 66th, still deployed to guard the baggage, were angry at having to get to their feet to avoid being trampled by the first wave of fugitive cavalry, who went through them at the gallop, but apart from that they had no trouble. They still kept the pursuing Afghan horsemen in check, firing and retiring steadily until they crossed the Mundabad Ravine south-west of the village. There they found a long ditch which gave excellent cover, from which they fired several more volleys at the enemy, who, after some delay, had started to come on in great strength. Salmon and his company of Jacob's Rifles were also back on the enemy side of the ravine, and like Quarry soon found themselves facing a large enemy force coming straight for the much-coveted baggage. The sepoy's behaved coolly and regularly, staying in extended order and firing volley after volley into the advancing crowds with calm deliberation and good effect. Then, as the Afghan cavalry began to outflank, they withdrew across the ravine, the men turning about when directed and firing at the enemy. Here Salmon met Quarry, who had got tired of retreating. 'I am going to make a stand here,' he said. 'I shall not go a step further. Come and make a stand.' By this time, however, Salmon's sepoy's were becoming demoralized by the presence of such a great horde of enemy, who had at last brought up their guns and started shelling. They started to melt away, and he might have lost them altogether if it had not been for Subedar-Major Haidar Khan, senior native officer of Jacob's Rifles, and a terrible man, who had constituted himself as Ready's right-hand man for dealing with sepoy's in the baggage area. The culprits returned, very shaken, to their young British officer!

Looking towards Khig from Mundabad, a long straggling line of men could be seen filing out of the gardens and heading across the parched plain to Khushk-i-Nakhud. From behind

them in the enclosures Nuttall heard the faint sound of a bugle sounding the retire, and decided that there was nothing to be gained by staying longer. He allowed Slade to fire a couple of rounds from his two batteries at the advancing enemy cavalry, and then ordered him to cease firing and retire. The smooth-bores were now right out of ammunition, so Slade sent them on ahead with Maclaine's gunless limbers. Maclaine was put in charge of Osborne's division, while Slade kept Fowell's guns under his own hand.

2

In order to describe the fighting on the plain of Maiwand up to the present stage of the battle an analysis was made of the narratives written by officer survivors, balanced against knowledge of the ground obtained during a recent visit to the site. The same will apply when telling the story of withdrawal from the field, but the history of this phase can be amplified from a very relevant document which may place Maiwand unique among battles. This is because, some weeks after the defeat the local villagers buried the dead from Burrows's force as quickly as they could in shallow graves scraped from the sand and gravel of the plain. They were in a hurry as they knew that a punitive column was soon to arrive, and expected extra-hard treatment if the bodies were still lying neglected where they had fallen; so they did the task, but with as little trouble to themselves as possible. There was no question of dragging decomposing corpses to a mass grave; the dead were buried as close as possible to where they were found. In places where the fighting had been fierce large graves were dug for anything up to eighty men; in the case of scattered individual remains, they were collected at central points, where five would be interred in a single small trench.

When Brigadier-General Daubeney's column did arrive, there was no difficulty in finding the graves, as the top-soil was still loose, covering little mounds in the flat plain. Locations were noted and plotted on Lieutenant Talbot's sketch map, and the graves were opened to try and identify the fallen. From this

information, and from eye-witness accounts, it is possible to deduce the tale of the retreat pace by pace, minute by minute, death by death. It is not intended to spoil continuity now, but for those who are interested there is a complete analysis at Appendix A. Page 170 shows both locations of the graves with routes taken during the withdrawal from the field, and detailed tables showing casualties incurred at various stages of the battle are given in the annexures to the same appendix.

We return now to follow the fortunes of the Khig group after the 66th Foot had been bulldozed from their position by Jacob's Rifles and some fugitive Grenadiers. However, having described the demoralization of some portions of the native regiments, it is only fair to note that they had suffered much more in comparison than had the British regiment. At the time that the line broke on the left, the Grenadiers had suffered something like a hundred and forty casualties; the 66th had lost in killed and wounded only a tenth of this figure, fourteen in all.

The group had lost only a few men during the confusion in front of the 66th's original position, and the pursuing enemy did not catch up until they were already two hundred yards away, moving towards Khig. The next three hundred yards saw a running battle during which the enemy kept up a heavy fire from close range, and sixty European and native soldiers were left dead in the wake of the withdrawal. Burrows did everything he could to divert the slowly receding tide towards Mundabad, where he may still have hoped to find the rearguard behind strong defences; but both Europeans and natives were completely bemused, and appeals to one as to another were equally unsuccessful. Harrison of Jacob's Rifles complained that as the officers' chargers had been sent away from the battle-line earlier, there was no chance of getting in front of the men to head them off. This was when Burrows realized that he could do nothing more there, and had galloped off to try and persuade the cavalry to make another effort.

Half-way to the ravine the men began to throw off their shock and come to their senses, stopping to fire on their tormentors, who were hovering twenty-five yards from them, never daring to close. This discouraged the Afghans still further, with the

result that only another fifteen men were lost over the remaining five hundred yards to the near bank. Reaching it at one of the steepest places, the survivors literally threw themselves down the escarpment. 'Into it they all tumbled pell-mell, and such was the rush that a colour-sergeant impaled himself on his own sword and was killed.' Any formation that had hitherto been maintained was broken by this difficult descent, so that it was a rabble that crossed the dry bed and climbed the bank opposite. At the top there was an empty water-channel, deep and awkward, through which water had been running at the beginning of the day. Now it had been diverted by the villagers who knew its value to thirsty soldiers, but it still made an excellent defence line for infantry. At first neither European nor native soldier could be persuaded to stand, but then came Lieutenant-Colonel Galbraith on his charger, shouting orders to his men, determined to reform the 66th. The rear companies began to listen. They turned and manned the ditch. Using the neighbouring walls as breastworks, they opened disciplined fire at the on-rushing enemy. They held them, then drove them back into the ravine.

The colonel had not been able to stop the leading elements, and these men carried on through small orchards and enclosures. Through one of them there flowed a small irrigation channel which had been omitted from the Afghan parched-earth plan, which was a wonderful piece of luck. The first-comers drank eagerly, heedless of the spatter of bullets all around them; later arrivals also imbibed deeply of the liquid mud stirred up by those in front. But, having satisfied their craving, the majority would not stop and passed on to another, the last, enclosure before open country, whence they began streaming out through a gap in the wall. Most of the leading companies of the 66th Foot went straight through without stopping, accompanied by some men from other regiments. They had lost all their own officers and would not obey orders from anyone else, so trudged heedlessly on. Grant of the Grenadiers was still able to walk, despite his wounded leg, and was one of the first to reach the last garden. Hurt though he was, he tried his best to make the men stand and reform, calling out as well as his dry throat permitted, even getting hold of a bugler of Jacob's Rifles to sound the halt and

assembly. But every man was well-nigh done from the day's work and the heat, and no one paid any attention to the bugle-calls. Grant could elicit no reply, other than the occasional expletive from a British soldier, and the men filed on out through the gap in the enclosure. A few Afghan irregular horsemen were waiting outside, firing in the saddle from behind a high wall, but the straggle of fugitives carried on regardless of the nuisance. Grant tried at least to turn the nearest of the men in the direction of the main body which he could see at Mundabad, but they plodded on, aiming for the shortest route across the plain to the Khushk-i-Nakhud spur and the road to Kandahar. So he gave up the attempt, and turned off towards Nuttall's force, accompanied only by a few Europeans and natives.

After his departure more officers began to accumulate in the garden, representatives of all three regiments, and they combined to make a resolute effort to stem the tide and make a final stand. They succeeded in collecting a mixed body of nearly a hundred and fifty soldiers and persuaded them to turn and man the walls. Colonel Mainwaring of Jacob's Rifles was the senior officer present at the time, and he took the precaution of stationing Beresford-Pierse of the 66th Foot with drawn revolver beside the gap to prevent any further exit. The Grenadiers in the enclosure at this time consisted only of Aslett and a few of his men.

The ghazis now got into the next enclosure and there began a rapid exchange of fire at a distance of from twenty-five to thirty yards. Mainwaring's problem was to persuade some soldiers to man the wall nearest to the enemy. While he was collecting a party together, suddenly he saw Burrows, whom he believed to have been killed, mounted on Burmadeen's chestnut troop-horse and trying to make some men who had taken shelter behind the back wall of the garden come back inside. Some sort of order began to form from chaos, but after about twenty minutes had passed it became clear that the enemy was beginning to outflank the garden with both infantry and cavalry. Besides, the guns were up and starting to open fire. Burrows knew that the walls would not stand up to artillery, and decided to move while there was still time. He ordered a bugler to sound the retire –

the call heard by Nuttall at Mundabad – and set off across the plain.

The prospect was not encouraging – a desert waste without shelter of any kind and, according to the brigadier-general, with all discipline at an end. However, some of the 66th got together under Major Oliver, rifle in hand, to drive off some Afghan cavalry at the point of the bayonet. Apart from this flurry, the enemy did not pursue vigorously – none of the regulars followed up at all – but instead closed in around Khig to prevent any further escape. So, after three or four miles the party succeeded in joining the British cavalry and artillery column. By that time Burrows, at Oliver's suggestion, had given his troop-horse to carry sorely-wounded Major Iredell and Captain Roberts of the 66th. Troopers of the Sind Horse brought in Oliver and Lynch of the 66th, and Harrison of Jacob's Rifles. Geoghegan went out and fetched in Colonel Mainwaring.

Burrows's retreat was comparatively unmolested because he had a rearguard, although he did not know it, which was in furious combat with the mass of the enemy. We take the story back to the rear companies of the 66th Foot who had begun the withdrawal from the battlefield in fairly good order. Captain Garratt and Captain Cullen had kept good hold on their men and had issued their orders with as much coolness as if on a regimental parade, but they both fell before reaching the ravine. Discipline was impossible to keep during the crossing, but there awaiting them on the other side was Colonel Galbraith, down on one knee with a Regimental Colour in his hand. To him they rallied, officers and men of all different units, over a hundred and ninety of them. And there died Galbraith. Young Barr lay slain over the second, still uncased, Colour. Lynch saw him before he had to go. McMath fell, and nearly sixty of his regiment. Selling their lives as dearly as they could, the remaining hundred and thirty all ranks made their way slowly on into the orchard with the irrigation channel, where another stand was made. Here Henn was killed, together with his two British non-commissioned officers and the half-company of his Sappers and Miners who had not been separated from him in the turmoil of the retreat. Also died half a company of the 66th and a number

of the Grenadiers who had stayed by their adjutant, Lieutenant Hinde. But still the survivors hoped to break away, and made a fighting withdrawal to the last garden, probably the one from which Burrows had sounded the retire, never suspecting in the widespread din of battle that so many of his brigade were fighting on, less than half a mile behind him. Half a company of the 66th were yet on their feet. Lieutenant Honeywood held a Colour high above his head.

‘Men! What shall we do to save this?’ he shouted, as he was shot down. Lieutenant and Adjutant Raynor seized the Colour, but soon fell mortally wounded. Big-Drummer Darby stayed with him and refused to leave, despite orders to go and save himself. So they died together. Bearing the Colour in their turn, Second-Lieutenant Olivey and Sergeant-Major Cuppage were killed in the last garden. Blackwood, hard hit though he was, had managed to get this far and died with his friends in the 66th Foot.

At last only Lieutenant Chute, Hinde and nine men lived, and they preferred to fight to the death in the open rather than boxed in by walls of mud-brick. The Kizilbash artillery colonel was forward with his guns, and gave an eye-witness account of their last stand. ‘Surrounded by the whole of the Afghan army, they fought on until only eleven men were left, inflicting enormous loss on their enemy. These men charged out of the garden, and died with their faces to the foe, fighting to the death. Such was the nature of their charge, and the grandeur of their bearing, that although the whole of the ghazis were assembled around them, no one dared to approach to cut them down. Thus, standing in the open, back to back, firing steadily and truly, every shot telling, surrounded by thousands, these officers and men died; and it was not until the last man was shot down that the ghazis dared advance upon them. The conduct of these men was the admiration of all that witnessed it.’ The end came just before sunset – officers and soldiers, privates of the 66th and sepoy of the Bombay Army, they died together, taunting their foes and daring them to come on and fight! This Afghan colonel’s evidence was confirmed by the number of dead horses, once mounts of the tribal cavalry, lying in a circle around a spot in the field outside the last garden’s retaining wall.

The Colours were defended to the last, and were then borne away by the victors, to be heard of only once again.

Bobby, Sergeant Kelly's dog, was present at the last stand. When the last friendly human had been killed he made his way, wounded as he was, through the enemy hordes and caught up with the retreating British column.

McMath's dog, Nellie, a favourite of the regiment who had also accompanied the column, was found buried beside her master.

The desperate resistance of the 66th Foot and their native comrades-in-arms held up the whole of Ayub Khan's left and most of his centre while Burrows's party got clear away from Khig. Nuttall marched off at the same time as Burrows, working on the bugle-call. But one wonders why he had been left alone for the previous three-quarters of an hour, protected by no infantry except the baggage guard. The artillery were doing very little shooting, and the cavalry were doing nothing at all. The west sector seems to have been singularly quiet; everybody seems to have got away without too much trouble after the first few minutes. Nobody reports battles and deaths. Burrows seems to have had no difficulty in crossing the withdrawal route from the 66th line of retreat over to the cavalry – who were mostly withdrawing at a walk, under no pressure. He also made his way back to Khig intact. So something was holding up the Afghan right on the field of battle.

All the narratives were confined to events actually seen by the writers – presumably by order. So we would have known little or nothing about the last actions of the Galbraith rearguard if it had not been for the Kizilbash colonel and the graves discovered by Daubeney's column. Griffith of the Grenadiers, however, infringes his terms of reference to write about a gallant stand by the Grenadiers in which hundreds of the enemy were killed. But his commanding officer, Anderson, adds a covering note to say that he personally had seen no such thing, thereby giving the impression that his second-in-command was talking nonsense. That is as may be – perhaps the colonel was still smarting over the loss of his water-bottle – but there may have been something behind the claim.

We know that Mayne's cavalry charged around the Grenadier rear, killing their pursuers and giving them a respite in which to reform. Monteith's sowars helped by killing or wounding at least twenty of the enemy whom they found on the other side of the infantry, and some of the remaining squadrons may have done likewise. But there was no major battle reported to have taken place anywhere along the line of retreat to Mundabad. Grenadier casualties described in the narratives were all incurred in the battle line or during the very early stages of the retreat, before the cavalry charge. Yet half a mile from their original position, and midway between it and the Mundabad Ravine, Daubeney's column found seventy Grenadiers all buried close together; while three hundred to four hundred yards further on towards the centre of the two villages were a scattered group of small graves containing five bodies in each. There were no graves between the 66th position and these two areas, as would have been the case if the retreating infantry had been massacred in a running slaughter.

So the basic facts are that some of the Grenadiers had the opportunity to get into some form of order; something blocked the victorious advance of the Afghan right; a large number of Grenadiers were killed all together a long way from the battle-line. There was also Griffith's hearsay evidence.

Perhaps, after the cavalry had swung by, some determined and capable native officers called the remains of the rear three Grenadier companies together and brought them into formation once more. Ignoring the company that sought refuge among the 66th and the dispersed elements that were making their way to Mundabad, they may have begun to withdraw slowly from the field as a soldierly and disciplined body. Soon, however, the ghazis would have regained their battle fury, and fallen upon them with such blood-lust, and in so great numbers, that the native company commanders had to form squares to defend themselves – the men were probably by now in a state of mind receptive to orders. And there on the plain of stone and sand, deserted by their comrades and without artillery support, they fought on until their limited supply of ammunition ran out, holding the ghazis at a distance until the already heavily-punished Herati infantry

came to pour volleys into the Grenadier ranks and Afghan artillery once more commenced its deadly thunder. Then, after two-thirds lay dead or seriously wounded, it could be that the last forty charged out with the bayonet and made three hundred yards towards the ravine before the enemy, momentarily disconcerted, caught up. Horsemen charged among them; there was no ammunition left to make the tribesmen keep their distance. Dispersed and scattered, they were cut down or shot as easy prey.

As regards the sepoy buried on the position of their last stand, Brigadier-General Daubeney was quite sure that they had fought to the last in regular formation. He assumed that they were part of the battle-line, and excluded them from his figures for the numbers killed during the withdrawal phase.

Burrows, on his way to appeal to Currie and Nuttall, would have passed south of these Grenadier companies several minutes before they were compelled to halt and form squares. He must have seen them coming on in good order, and in no trouble at the time. So, feeling confident that they would be all right, he had no qualms about heading back across country to the Khig fighting, as the 66th group had been in a much worse state when he had left them to try and summon help. He would then have passed six hundred yards south of the Grenadier squares, and the noise of their firing would have been indistinguishable in the general roar of battle. There must have been a lull in the fighting about the time that he told the bugler to sound the retreat. He would never have given the order to disengage if he had been aware that a quarter of his battle-line infantry were still offering organized resistance. Three hundred officers and men fought to the last during the withdrawal from the field, between the battle-line and the ravine or among the gardens and orchards of Khig, dying where they stood, or conceding ground only reluctantly in the face of overwhelming odds. In the same way as the rear companies of the 66th Foot and their sepoy supporters held back the enemy and made Burrows's retreat possible, so may a last stand of the Bombay Grenadiers have enabled the cavalry to reform and the Mundabad rearguard to disengage without great loss.

CHAPTER 9

Retreat to Kandahar

I

IT WAS NEARLY four o'clock when Nuttall ordered Ready to withdraw with his baggage guard. By that time Quarry was a disappointed and disgusted man, for of the half-company that he had retained with him only six had stayed until the end. He still did not want to come away, but obeyed his orders and began to retire slowly from the position on the battle side of the ravine that he had held for so long against such odds. On the Mundabad side he was joined by some more men of the 66th, probably those who had come over from Khig with Grant; and some Grenadiers and sepoy from Jacob's Rifles who had been collected by Subedar-Major Haidar Khan. He moved off in skirmishing order, and after half a mile was joined by Bray and his men, who had been slightly disorganized by meeting unexpected rifle-fire from the village on their way. So Quarry soon had most of his company under his control again, and an extra officer in the person of Second-Lieutenant Mellis, transport officer of the 66th, who had spent the battle with the baggage.

As the infantry of the rearguard pulled out of Mundabad they came upon the remains of the field hospital, which towards the end of the battle had been moved out from the ravine. Here wounded men lay abandoned, the doolie-bearers having deserted long ago. As the rear skirmishers passed, Europeans and natives alike would painfully raise their heads and beg to be saved, not left to be hacked to pieces by the savage foe. The surgeons and their devoted assistants had done great work getting the loads off camels and ponies and putting sick and wounded men on them instead; many more had been given lifts on gun-limbers or mounted on spare horses, but there were some for whom no

transport could be found and these had to be left to their ghastly fate.

Surgeon-Major Preston of the 66th Foot had been seriously wounded early in the action and carried off the field; he describes his experiences as follows: 'After my wounds had been attended to, I was lying quietly on my stretcher, when all of a sudden the bearers took it up and commenced running off with it as fast as they could go, shouting as they ran along that the ghazis were upon us. There was a regular stampede of men and animals making off at the best speed that they could. All was in utter confusion, no order of any kind, but everybody evidently bent on doing the utmost possible to save his own life, and get out of the way of danger as fast and as best he could. With this object, all the loads had been thrown off the baggage animals, which were at once appropriated for riding purposes. The ground all about was, in consequence, covered with camp equipage, boxes of ammunition and treasure, mess-stores, wines, and so on. My bearers had not carried me far when they deserted to a man; and after two other modes of conveyance in which I had been placed that afternoon had failed, I was finally taken up by a horse artillery wagon. All this time the stampede had been going on, and men of all races, horses, camels and bullocks passed me in confusion.'

Slade says: 'All over the wide expanse of desert are to be seen men in twos and threes retreating. Sick men almost naked are astride donkeys, mules, ponies and camels. Horses limp along with ugly wounds. The hordes of irregular horsemen are to be seen among our baggage animals relentlessly cutting down one and all, and looting. Men can hardly speak, the wounded open their mouths and show a dried parched tongue, and with a sad expression convey to your mind but a glimpse of their intense suffering.'

The Mundabad group under Nuttall was now well away, nearly a mile along the Khushk-i-Nakhud track, the Sind Horse to the right of the guns, the 3rd Light Cavalry on the left. During the early part of the withdrawal, which had obviously started only just in time, Quarry's party suffered casualties not only from bullets, but from artillery fire. The Afghan guns had come up.

But he and his men killed a fair share of the enemy by steady shooting at four hundred yards range. Afghan cavalry harassed the column, but fortunately made no attempt to cut off the retreat, confining their attentions to the tail. Whenever they massed for a serious attack the column halted while Slade unlimbered and fired a few rounds, causing them to disperse again. When the threat did not justify bringing the guns into action the cavalry rear party, E. V. P. Monteith and his troop, would charge, but the Afghan irregular horse 'would not wait!' The ghazis did not pursue for long, however, and the last enemy artillery shot fell among the rearguard at about half-past five. Ayub Khan had ordered his cavalry, mostly irregular Heratis, to take over the pursuit from the Afghan infantry, but the majority preferred now to return and plunder the baggage. After about two miles they seemed to have lost interest completely, giving Monteith the opportunity to start collecting stray animals as mounts for some of the stragglers dotted all over the plain. While he was doing this he came upon Mellis trying vainly to make some men from the 66th keep up with the rear party. Most of them, unfortunately, had been at the officers' mess stores and were drunk. It was obvious to Monteith that nothing would get these men on to their feet again, so he persuaded Mellis to hurry on rather than sacrifice his life to no useful purpose; while the sowars would try to catch some more animals to carry the drunks. This they managed to do after some time, and loaded several men on to the beasts – whereupon they promptly fell off again. There was nothing for it but to look for ropes or straps to secure them in place. However, all this delay had resulted in Monteith dropping a good two miles behind the rear of the cavalry brigade, and while the search was in progress he was suddenly menaced by several hundred enemy horsemen who had seen that he was all on his own. There was no alternative but to abandon the British soldiers in order to extricate his troop and resume his proper duties. The presence of such a large body of hostiles seemed to him sufficiently serious to justify sending a sowar galloping off to warn Nuttall that the column might be attacked.

He was not hotly pursued, and was soon finding time again

to succour more unfortunates. He dismounted some of his men to keep the enemy at a distance with carbine fire, while others were employed on putting wounded men on baggage camels. But he waited too long. This time, he *was* cut off from the column, with no chance of getting the wounded away. There was only one answer – remounting his men and drawing sabres, he charged furiously at the Afghans. They broke before him and galloped away in disorder, to trouble him no more. So the young officer who had been thwarted in his attempt to mount the first charge of the day from Mundabad had his chance at last, and took full advantage of it.

Monteith had done excellent work, It must be remembered that he and his men were comparatively fresh, as they had spent the day with the baggage, had not been exposed to the murderous fire in the front line, and, moreover, had had access to water throughout the day. Leach said afterwards that both the Monteiths of the Sind Horse should have been given more recognition for their services, as should have Quarry, Geoghegan, Fowle and Griesbach. Some of the sowars in the rear party were even more deserving of praise; Mayne had decided on his own that Monteith's troop was not strong enough for the job, and had quietly reinforced him with a non-commissioned officer and twelve men from his own battered squadron.

The pursuit had ceased completely by the time that the Khig and Mundabad groups joined together at the Khushk-i-Nakhud dry river-bed, three miles from the ravine. Here there were strings of karezes on both sides of the river-bed, and plenty of water in them, but it was a great depth down and nobody had a long enough rope or bucket. Nor did anyone feel like stopping to capture and ransack a village for the necessary gear. Monteith dismounted his men and held the east bank of the river-bed, and with one or two exceptions no tribesman ventured into it.

The cavalry and Slade's guns were now two miles further on. Ahead of them plodded a stream of animals, spare ponies and pack-bullocks, some still with their original loads, many ridden by unwounded followers and soldiers who might well have walked and given their mounts to the wounded. The plight of

the fugitives has been graphically described by Surgeon Kirtikar, who had tried to leave the line on foot with the cavalry when he saw that all was lost. This was all right until those whom he was accompanying began to trot, which was more than even he could manage! Luckily 'at this time a sepoy of Jacob's Rifles named Alawaria, General Number 1642, H Company, carried me on the back of a horse behind him for over a mile, across the deep dry ravine.' One notes how the doctor gives full details of his saviour, hoping that he would be rewarded by higher authority in due course!

Kirtikar got a horse at Mundabad, and started to retreat with Nuttall's group when the time came. He was well on his way when he heard that Iredell was wounded and having to ride Burmadeen's troop-horse. So he rode back and took charge of the major until they found a stretcher and bearers. Kirtikar put Iredell on the stretcher, and in the absence of splint and bandages, 'I supported the broken leg by means of Major Iredell's sword-scabbard and a thick tent-rope.' Then he rode on, worried about Mainwaring and Harrison, who had ridden slowly on in an exhausted condition 'with the shadow of death pictured on their faces'. On his way, he came across a stretcher-bearer from his own hospital carrying the field-companion, and took it from him; the aromatic spirits of ammonia out of it were of immense value to him in his ministering to the weary and the wounded. For several miles he carried this field-companion around his waist, and gave it up only when the straps broke. He then heard from a Sind Horse sowar that the stretcher-bearers could not carry Iredell any longer, and that they had laid the stretcher down on the ground. So he rode back three whole miles and found the party 'with the poor bearers sitting beside the stretcher, and crying out for water in the most piteous manner'. Luckily, on his way back he had found Mainwaring's charger with the syce riding it, and had brought them with him. Helped by a soldier from the 66th he put Iredell on its back and escorted him onwards. 'All along the road fighting men and followers kept crying for water. Hard was the fate of the sufferers who, having faced the ravages of fire for full four hours, had now for four times as much length of time to face the ravages of the most

agonizing thirst, hunger and fatigue during a march extending over forty miles.'

2

The retreat was following the line of the track running from the Malmand Pass through Mundabad across the Khushk-i-Nakhud River, skirting the south-west foothills of the Khushk-i-Nakhud mountain range and travelling roughly parallel to the main Girishk-Kandahar highway until joining it at Hauz-i-Madat. The time had come when Burrows had to make some decision about finding water for his men. He and Nuttall had already passed within a mile or two of an adequate supply in their old camping ground of Pirzada, where they had stopped on their way out to the Helmand. Surgeon Street of the 3rd Light Cavalry left the column and went over there with a few companions, to find no enemy in sight, and to drink deeply, horse and man, before rejoining the miserable masses of the retreat. St John and his escort had also ridden to check if water was still available, and had returned to report that it was there in abundance.

Burrows had then sent an orderly to try and turn the head of the rabble, but the baggage, sick, wounded and stragglers already extended over several miles and it was quite impossible to make them change direction. But both humans and animals were all obviously in a state approaching exhaustion, and something had to be done. Hauz-i-Madat, the nearest point on the direct line to Kandahar where there was a chance of finding water was sixteen miles distant. Another possibility was Karez-i-Ata, visible to the right and about seven miles away – but it was only a possibility; if he diverted the walking element in that direction, even if he were able to do so, and it turned out that there was no water there for them, they would never be able to make it on to Hauz-i-Madat. It would be different for the cavalry; they should be in a condition to cover the extra distance.

At this juncture Monteith's sowar rode up with his tidings of a threat to the rear of the column, and Burrows could postpone his decision no longer. He ordered the cavalry brigade to turn

about and retrace their steps to support Monteith in offsetting the reported threat to the rear of the column; after that they were to make their way to Karez-i-Ata. He himself would go direct to Karez-i-Ata with Mayne and his men as escort. Lieutenant Reid, the British Service infantry officer serving his attachment to the 3rd Light Cavalry, was to push on ahead and collect such sowars as he might find along the road. With them he was to get ahead of the retreat and form some sort of an advance guard, in case Ayub Khan had made a forced march across the Maiwand Pass to Sinjiri and cut the road. So Reid set off, ploughing steadily through the plodding stream of retreating soldiers, followers and animals, here and there getting a sowar for his purpose; in the end, however, he only found eleven in all as most of those he came across were riding lame or wounded horses, ponies and mules, and everyone was nearly prostrate from thirst and heat.

Nuttall, a grumbling Currie – who thought the whole thing was completely unnecessary – and the rest of the cavalry brigade rode sourly back to the river-bed to find that Monteith had driven back the enemy finally and for all time, and was occupying himself by putting wounded and exhausted men on horses and camels. Here at least was an officer who had managed to assert his independence and behave like one. It is a measure of the demoralization of his seniors that these wretches had been abandoned in the desert in the face of a minimal threat – which had been neutralized by the determination of one officer and his troop.

There is no record of what Nuttall said to Monteith – who does not seem to have sent another messenger to say that all was safe. However, shamed presumably by his example, all now joined in to help the incapacitated, even to the extent of dismounting troopers to make extra horses available. There was a diversion when Malcolmson, who appears to have been rather susceptible to false alarms, reported a large body of enemy horsemen approaching from the north, but no one else could see them, and the loading continued. When it was all done, the cavalry brigade marched off to join Burrows at Karez-i-Ata with Malcolmson and the Sind Horse in the lead. Geoghegan with a troop of the 3rd Light Cavalry was detailed to take over the

task of rear party from Monteith. Nuttall and his staff stayed close to the rear party, helping to shepherd the sick and wounded.

They all moved off as the sun set – the first good thing it had done that day – but the rear elements could only move slowly. Soon Nuttall had to send his orderly officer, J. Monteith, to tell Malcolmson that he was going too fast and that he was to slow down. This instruction did not have the slightest effect, so orderlies were despatched with the same message – all to no avail. When the Sind Horse disappeared completely another orderly was sent bearing an order to halt, and this time Malcolmson acknowledged the message. But he sent back to say that he was now close to water and his men were very thirsty, so he would not halt but intended instead to go on until he reached the well. So the rear of the brigade, burdened with all the casualties, were left to find their way as best they could in the dark, helped by a rising moon.

Burrows and Mayne were at Karez-i-Ata by eight o'clock, just as the moon became visible, and found there plenty of water, so Mayne watered and fed his horses, and Burrows had some undisturbed rest in which to recover to some extent from his ordeal. An hour later Malcolmson and the Sind Horse arrived, saying that Nuttall and the rest of the brigade were close behind. So they waited until quite some time had passed and Burrows said that he could stay no longer; he must get on after the infantry and guns. He sent back men to try and contact Nuttall, but they were not able to find him; as a last resort he ordered trumpets to be sounded, and was relieved to hear a faint reply – so he felt justified in setting out for Hauz-i-Madat. Nuttall and his group eventually found the well, and stayed an hour to water and feed before leaving again. Soon they lost the track in the dark, and had to travel by a pocket-compass, but hit it again after another hour.

By this time the whole countryside was aroused and signal fires were blazing in every village along the road, relaying the glad tidings that there were infidels to be killed and loot to be had without too great an element of personal risk. The main body of the infantry column was still trudging and staggering on. Many of the native troops fell out and lay beside the road;

even the 66th were in a bad way, but Quarry and his officers, on foot with their men, managed to keep them going. At nine o'clock Ready left the rear and moved up the line of retreat trying to restore some order, and, as much as he could, getting men and animals into parties for mutual protection. The guns had followed behind the long string of transport animals instead of going back with the cavalry brigade, and it became a drill that the last defended point should be the last two guns under Slade. Guns and carriages were crowded with exhausted or wounded officers and men. At midnight Slade had to abandon one of the smooth-bore guns as the horses drawing it were quite unable to continue; shortly afterwards, for the same reason, he left behind the store limber wagon and spare gun-carriage, so as to yoke their oxen to the guns. Leach had been sent by Burrows to look for one of his personal baggage camels which had been carrying a case of soda-water, which would have been a godsend to some of the wounded; but he had not been successful in finding it. His horse was too far gone to ride back to the brigadier-general at Karez-i-Ata, so he attached himself to Slade. Fortunately for all, he knew the ground that they were passing over, his only anxiety being that they might miss Hauz-i-Madat in the darkness and not strike water until they reached Ashu-Khan.

Soon after eleven o'clock, however, his fears were allayed as there came into view a sparse line of poplars stretching up into the dappled moonlight – and trees in that country meant water. Next, beside the road there loomed the hauz itself, a large masonry water-tank. But there was a setback to their hopes, it was found to be in useless disrepair, broken and empty. None the less, Leach knew that it must originally have been supplied from some nearby source, and a search was instituted into the fields towards the darker shadows of the village orchards, while the column sat apathetically waiting in the settling dust. The seekers were unsuccessful at first, then a small well was discovered at a little distance from the road. When the cry went up there was an immediate stampede across the paddy by men running and stumbling over the irrigation channels in the dim light. But the well was shallow, and only one man could drink

at a time; and he, if he was not strong enough, would be plucked away and his place usurped by another. Soon the press of bodies was so fierce that those in front who had been lucky enough to slake their thirst had difficulty in getting away and making room for others. The spring was not fast-flowing, and after a few minutes a man was having to wait for some moments after his predecessor had finished before the well refilled sufficiently for him to take his turn. Many soldiers got at least something to drink, but the unfortunate followers had no rights and were too weak to prevail by force, so waited on the outskirts of the crowd. It became clear that the group would have to move on while numbers of the men were still without water. This was particularly distressing for the wounded, few of whom had friends so devoted and so strong as to fetch water for them. Maclaime, probably racked by self-criticism and trying to make amends, went to look for another source. He was grabbed by some lurking villagers and taken away, never to be seen again alive by his battery.

Burrows arrived at midnight and stayed waiting for the remains of his force to close up, giving more stragglers a chance to rejoin the column. Mayne went straight to sleep as soon as he dismounted, having allayed his thirst at Karez-i-Ata, and did not wake up until it was time to move on. Surgeon Dane of the Grenadiers arrived at about the same time as Burrows, and found it impossible to get anywhere near the well. Almost frantic with thirst, he left the road and struck off south across country for the Arghandab River four miles away, which he reached an hour and a half later. He was accompanied by some sowars, mounted infantrymen and syces with baggage ponies, and after drinking and resting for an hour they all set off for Kandahar along the river-bed, following an old camel track. Silently they stole past the hostile villages and reached Kandahar two hours after dawn, unseen and unmolested, the fortunate few.

Nuttall and the cavalry brigade were at Hauz-i-Madat by half-past one in the morning, so that the whole surviving combatant element of Burrows's force was once more united under its commander; except for Reid's makeshift advance guard, who had walked into Ashu-Khan at midnight and found water, to

which men and animals rushed and drank greedily. At two o'clock Burrows decided to move on, although many of the men were still at the well and others were still coming in by ones and twos. 'I could not stay longer, as I feared a panic among the cavalry, and that they might leave me without protection for the guns. Some shots from jezails and matchlocks from surrounding villages were magnified into the enemy's guns pursuing us; every clump of trees on the side of the road were troops of cavalry threatening our flanks; and all sorts of scares were constantly occurring, originating, I am pained to say, generally with the officers in command of the regiments.'

The cavalry brigade moved off, with Malcolmson in the lead as before, and with Nuttall in the rear. Behind them laboured the tired infantry and transport. Mellis and his men left Hauzi-Madat with unslaked thirst, and had difficulty in keeping up with the others. There had been no possibility of watering the artillery horses, nor even of getting enough water to dampen the feed in their nose-bags. Lynch was still lying on a gun which had been too hot to touch when he had first been placed upon it, and its team now included an officer's charger. Just before they moved a soldier brought him some water in a tin, but his tongue was so swollen that he could hardly swallow it. One of his men, Burgess by name, took his sword and revolver off to make him more comfortable, and promised to take them on to Kandahar; but he must have been killed on the way, as Lynch never saw him again.

Burrows stayed at the rear of the main body with Slade. Before they departed he agreed, at Leach's request, that Geoghegan and his troop should stay to protect the crowd of infantry and followers who were still trying to get a drink, until they had finished. Geoghegan waited for an hour and a half, during all of which time men kept on appearing, until the flow from the well stopped. He marched then for Ashu-Khan, shepherding his charges before him through the lessening darkness to the dawn, when the roused villagers beside the road began to fire upon him.

Slade had rehorsed his guns from the wagons but the teams were by this time in a poor way, and could not keep up with

the horses of the cavalry who had been watered, fed and rested. History soon repeated itself in that within the hour Nuttall had to send an orderly forward to tell Malcolmson that the rear was a long way behind, and that he must march at a slower pace; and within a quarter of an hour after that Leach, who had found his second horse, came riding up to Nuttall with a message from Burrows telling *him* to slow down.

Neither of these messages seemed to have any effect, so Burrows sent Leach up the column again, this time to order the cavalry to halt, as the tail was now two miles behind. Nuttall obeyed, but realizing that his own staff were incapable of exerting any influence on Malcolmson asked Leach if he would mind going forward to try and stop him. This was rather a different approach, and Leach willingly cantered off. He caught up with Malcolmson, and succeeded in stopping him – even though his men were thirsty, and he was nearing the waters of Ashu-Khan. The Sind Horse were then a mile ahead of Nuttall and three miles in front of the guns.

When the rear had had the chance to close, the march was resumed in time to reach Ashu-Khan at daybreak, when another long halt was made. There was plenty of water at first, but the villagers diverted it as soon as they realized what was happening, and the supply dried up immediately. The artillery draught-horses were now scarcely up to their task at all, and Burrows ordered the cavalry to help the guns. Currie put two troop-horses in the lead of a gun, one in regular harness and one 'lassooed', and was harnessing another to a smooth-bore, when a cry was raised that the enemy's cavalry was advancing to attack the rear of the column. The alarm had originated from Malcolmson, but Mayne used his binoculars to identify the 'enemy' as Geoghegan and his troop bringing in the stragglers, and was able to reassure Burrows. Despite the alarm having turned out to be false, Slade decided in any case to abandon Fowle's two 12-pounder howitzers, but to carry on with their limbers and loads of wounded. Fowle now took over the E/B centre division guns, while Jones and Faunce stayed with the three remaining 6-pounder smooth-bore guns.

Village snipers followed the rear of the Maiwand column as

it left Ashu-Khan, and managed to kill Lieutenant Whitby of the Grenadiers, the only officer to lose his life on the road to Kandahar. From then onwards shots were exchanged with all the villages on either side of the road, but formed bodies had little to fear. Mayne had been detailed as flank protection and deployed skirmishers on both sides to return the enemy fire and keep the tribesmen behind their walls; so even though the road had become very narrow, running between cultivated plots, orchards and houses, no one else was hit. The villagers preferred to keep their distance rather than close in. Geoghegan continued to bring up the rear.

Malcolmson reached Sinjiri and the north bank of the Arghandab River at seven o'clock. He was fired at from the village, and saw a small band of hostiles on the far bank, evidently preparing to dispute passage of the ford. He accordingly got together as many of the infantry as he could, and they, led by a sergeant of the 66th, drove the enemy back into the hills with a well-directed fire, and secured the crossing.

The first gun came up at eight o'clock and the others soon after. The teams now got their first drink since Mashak, twenty-two hours and forty-five miles earlier, a performance of great endurance for draught-animals. But despite the water the gun-teams were now too weak to drag a limber up even a slight incline by their efforts alone, and the guns had to be manhandled over every difficult piece of ground. Crossing the Arghandab was almost more than they could manage, so Burrows got help from Quarry to run them up the gradient on the far side – the men, though very tired themselves, were still willing to assist. Two more of the smooth-bores had to be abandoned here, despite great efforts made under intermittent enemy sniping.

Surgeon Kirtikar arrived at about this time and slaked his thirst in the river. 'But here the enemy was in view again. Bullets kept flying over our heads, our position was one of extreme danger, isolated and a handful as we were, with a gun serving as fit attraction for the enemy. Lieutenant Salmon and Lieutenant Lawford (of the Transportation Department) I left behind, being determined to bring the gun in, and I rode on. The only way of saving life was to fight our way to Kandahar.' The gun was, in

fact, brought in to Kandahar, the only smooth-bore to return.

The wounded Surgeon-Major Preston of the 66th had been put on an artillery wagon early in the afternoon after having been deserted by his bearers, and had got as far as Ashu-Khan, where the horses were unharnessed as there was the possibility of some water. Perhaps they drank too much, but when they were brought back they were so utterly exhausted that they could not be made to move again. 'I lay helpless on the wagon for, I should say, a couple of hours, expecting at every moment that some of our party would be shot, as the villagers here, as they did all along the road, kept continually firing at us. However, as a few stragglers of the 66th came up, I asked them to stay by me, and use their rifles in return. In this way the villagers were kept off. After some time a camel with a pair of kajawas came up, with Apothecary Cordiero of the Subordinate Medical Department (Bombay), who had been walking all night. He stopped the camel, and had me put in one of the kajawas, and regardless of his own safety remained with me for a long time, and did everything in his power to assist me. I had not proceeded far in the kajawa before the cords holding it together commenced to give way, and to save me from falling the camel had to be made to lie down quickly. While lying helpless on the ground in the broken kajawa, I was passed by a large body of Sind Horse under the command of Colonel Malcolmson. After I had been lying on the ground for some time, Captain Slade, Royal Horse Artillery, came up with one of the smooth-bore guns, and seeing me, and the situation I was in, at once determined on endeavouring to save my life, and not to leave me to my inevitable fate. His horses were so utterly beaten that they would not have been equal to my additional weight; so, in order to save my life, he abandoned the gun, and had me put upon the limber. Even then it was only by his splendid tact and management, his presence of mind and great coolness in danger (for the inhabitants kept firing at us all along), that he succeeded in getting his horses to move at all.' Slade confirms the story. 'At about nine o'clock I was obliged to abandon another 6-pounder, as the horses would no move, there was heavy firing from the villages, and Doctor Preston of the 66th was lying on the limber dangerously wounded.

Though we were absolutely obliged to leave this gun, we were enabled to save the limber and its freight.'

It was at this stage of the retreat to Kandahar that Gunner Collis won the Victoria Cross by running out towards the snipers to draw their fire on to himself, and distract them from shooting up the wounded on the limber.

Burrows says: 'Crossing the Arghandab was tedious and difficult work for the guns, the horses being completely knocked up. Slade's indomitable pluck and energy, however, overcame all obstacles; and although five of the smooth-bore guns, which had never been properly horsed or manned, had to be abandoned during the retreat, he brought in his four 9-pounders safely, crowded with wounded officers and men, who would otherwise have perished on the road.'

Mayne and his squadron stayed behind on the right bank of the Arghandab after the rest of the column had crossed. Nuttall had detailed him to wait for Geoghegan and his stragglers, who were not yet in sight; he was to keep the crossing clear, and help the rear party in if necessary. It was hot, it was dry, there was white, hurting glare. But there was water. There were occasional wafts of cool, moist air. There were trees and shade for the fortunate few. The men were tired, the horses were jaded, but all had quenched their thirst – a careful and methodical operation. The sowars would have been ordered not to drink to excess; the horses would have had no option, dragged away from the stream by their masters as soon as they were judged to have had enough for the time being.

Mayne posted look-outs all around, retaining one section under a non-commissioned officer, mounted and ready for action. After a while he may have turned his attention to a second watering detail for the horses at rest. One can imagine detachments of sowars in succession leading down their animals to stand knee-deep in the shallow water near the bank; the horses stretching out their necks and wrinkling their noses in sheer ecstasy, luxuriating in the cool liquid. Perhaps a troop-horse plunged his entire head under the water, and shook himself dry with a great rattle of harness; or a cunning silladar pony suddenly lay down, to be cursed and kicked to his feet again by his

unwary master. In barracks, the bits would have been slipped out of the horses' mouths to make drinking easier; but this was forbidden on active service when at any moment shots might scatter a watering party. Then woe betide the sowar with a frightened horse, no bit in the mouth to control it with, and little prospect of buckling it back. Girths were loosened cautiously just before drinking, and tightened again immediately afterwards. Mayne was at all times alert, watching out for just such an emergency. He must have been a strange sight, his uniform jacket shapeless and wrinkled, stained with his own blood and that of others, stiff with dried sweat and caked dust, now dampening again beneath the arms and under his equipment from his recent drinking at the river. The leather of his boots would have been scuffed and torn by the thorn and spiny scrub of the Maiwand battle-field, blotched with black patches of perspiration surrounded by white rims of salt where the sweat had already dried. The rusty stain of dried blood seepage would have shown through two bandages. He listened.

Faintly through the midday air could be heard an occasional pop-pop of carbine-fire. There was no more time for ease, the whole squadron remounted. The watchers looked to their front, eyes trying to pierce the scrub for a sight of hostile villagers. The others waited tiredly in readiness and friendship for their fellows to come riding up through the weary morning. Now Geoghegan's carbines were clearly to be heard, mingled with the desultory fizzling crack of the villagers' jezails. Soon the leading points of his screen came in sight, then the rest of the troop boxing in a sad shuffling group of walking wounded and followers. The former, many of whom had discarded their weapons, were near exhaustion, on their feet only through hope of water and fear of the wrath of that huge and angry young man, Lieutenant Geoghegan of the 3rd Light Cavalry, who was determined to bring in, willy-nilly, his maximum quota of survivors. The followers, thin by nature and undernourished, would now have been hollow-cheeked and ghastly from dehydration, hard put to keep going, but imbued with that indomitable urge to survive without which their ancestors would never have preserved their race through the internecine turmoil of feudal India. Reach-

ing the river, soldier and follower, wounded private and tailor's assistant dropped weakly to the ground at the river's edge to drink. Men washed their lacerated bodies, soaked their rough bandages and took comfort.

Mayne and Geoghegan waited for a last few minutes to see if there was any sign of more stragglers coming up from behind. Then they crossed the river, the last two officers of the Maiwand brigades to come out of the Arghandab, and handed over rear-guard duties to Captain Anderson of the Poona Horse and his troop from Kandahar.

3

News of the mutiny by Sher Ali Khan's army had caused considerable excitement among the native population of Kandahar, but any ideas of an armed rising had been quenched by the story of the mutineers' defeat by the Girishk column. Brigadier-General Brooke was expecting trouble and was doing everything he could to reduce the threat. He arranged for every Afghan approaching Kandahar to be disarmed, however peaceful and law-abiding he and his friends might appear. He also moved three of the 40-pounder guns into the citadel and positioned them so that they could fire into the city, a precaution which caused consternation and made a salutary impression on the inhabitants.

Outside the city, however, the locals had heard of Ayub Khan's advance, and the more recalcitrant spirits soon got up to mischief. There was quite a lot of excitement during the night of 19 July, when a cavalry patrol operating just outside cantonments was fired upon. One sowar was killed, and the native officer commanding the party was badly wounded in the right arm. His horse was also hit and he was unable to stop it single-handed when it bolted, followed by the rest of the troop, so an opportunity to chase after the enemy was lost. While Brooke, first on the scene, was standing beside the dead sowar a sepoy sentry decided that he was a tribesman, and sent a bullet whizzing just over his head from a range of four hundred yards.

Although he acknowledged that it had been a very good shot, Brooke accepted no excuses and the sentry was properly punished next morning for wild firing! The country around cantonments was a mass of cemeteries with thousands of graves and vaults which provided excellent cover for snipers and ambushes. Brooke had been trying for some time to get permission to flatten these vantage points, but without success. But now after the affair of the patrol he persuaded General Primrose to let him take down all walls and enclosures in the immediate vicinity of cantonments – of which authorization he availed himself to the full, and a little over!

In the evening 'I took all the cavalry officers, English and native, round the camp, and gave them my ideas of the way in which they should patrol, and what a patrol should do when fired on (i.e. *not* run away).'

Two days later Brooke and Major Adam, the Assistant Quartermaster-General, went with a small cavalry escort on reconnaissance up the Arghandab, and were fired on by a gang during their return journey. The enemy were not very numerous, so Brooke sent two sowars back to Kandahar with a written message asking for twenty infantry to chase the tribesmen through the rocky terrain. As for himself, he was anxious to practise what he had preached, and have a go at the Afghans. So he and Adam, together with the eight remaining sowars of the escort, turned themselves for an hour or so into private soldiers and did a little skirmishing on foot armed with carbines. After a few exchanges of shots the tribesmen vanished, and the cavalry and infantry who eventually arrived from Kandahar had a fruitless search. Brooke was furious to hear that despite his written message the two horsemen whom he had sent to deliver it had become over-excited and shouted to everyone they met that the General Sahib was engaged in a great battle with thousands of the enemy who were pressing on to Kandahar. So the whole garrison had turned out, and there was an uproar in the city.

During the next few nights, guards on two of the city gates were shot at from outside, and Brooke pleaded yet again to be allowed to demolish all cover in the area. But the local Afghan

officials claimed that the enclosures surrounded very holy shrines and mosques, so Primrose would not agree.

First news of the defeat at Maiwand arrived in Kandahar at half-past one in the morning of 28 July, brought by a jemadar of the Sind Horse and his troop. They told Brooke that they were the only survivors, that Burrows and Nuttall had been killed and the whole force cut to pieces. Told to account for his presence the jemadar said that he had been ordered to carry the ill-tidings by a badly-wounded gunner major, who had given him his binoculars as token – if true, this could only have been Blackwood. Brooke knew better than to believe the worst, but there was no doubt in his mind that a terrible disaster had occurred – the only question was, had a portion of Burrows's column escaped, and if so how many? He dressed hurriedly and ran over to Primrose's house to brief him. While there he pointed out that it would be quite impossible to defend cantonments against a victorious Afghan army with the small number of troops available. He therefore requested leave to abandon them and to start moving all sick, ammunition, public and regimental property into the citadel at once, the only place that could be defended with any chance of holding out. He was assuming, of course, that there might be none of Burrows's men left to help man the ramparts of the city – according to the military textbooks of the time, this would have required eighteen thousand men! Primrose, who was feeling far from well, agreed and placed the organization of all the arrangements unreservedly in Brooke's capable hands.

At four o'clock a few native stragglers came in, and it became apparent that some of the column might have escaped destruction. The full story was eventually told by Veterinary-Surgeon Oliver of the Royal Horse Artillery battery, who rode in greatly exhausted about an hour later. He had found water at Mundabad and had prudently watered his horse. Then he had joined the baggage column, where he met Doctor Burroughs of the Sind Horse, and they agreed to keep together and push on. They passed the E/B centre division guns, the Battery Sergeant-Major and a smooth-bore gun, and moved on at all speed to Hauz-i-Madat, which they reached at moonrise. On arrival they found

what was probably the head of the fugitive rabble, mostly cavalry, and Oliver's own forge cart. These men said that the villagers had fired on them when they were looking for water, and that they had found none – they did not think that there was any. Nobody was in charge, all other officers were still in rear, either doing their duty or too severely wounded to do so. Leach, who found the well, was still three hours away. So Oliver pushed on again with two gunners, Sherlock and Price, and about a dozen cavalry defectors. They passed the villages of Ashu-Khan and Sinjiri undetected, and saw nobody until they rode up to the Arghandab River, where they found a few still earlier escapers; they were overtaken by some others as they watered their horses. A single shot was fired at them from Kokeran, but they trotted on fast and arrived in Kandahar Cantonments just before five o'clock. Oliver went straight to the artillery quarters, but found nobody there except servants and messmen, all busy packing. There he was found ten minutes later by Lieutenant Fox, Orderly Officer of the Artillery, and arraigned before Brooke in the main cantonment square. He told Brooke that a considerable proportion of the force had been saved and that the main body was probably about ten miles away, Burrows and Nuttall with them. He led a long line of stragglers, and as far as he knew there was no pursuit by the enemy; he had been fired at from the villages along the way. As soon as light came, and the locals began to stir, they would probably be of considerable annoyance to the incoming column – so assistance should be sent out to help Burrows over the last stages.

Brooke was in full agreement, and sent him escorted by Fox to the citadel, where Primrose had set up his headquarters, to tell his tale to the General, and ask permission for a column to move out as soon as it could be got together. As he was sure that leave would be granted, he straightway issued the orders for getting a force together. In fact, Fox and Oliver met Primrose and his staff on their way from the city to cantonments to see what was being done about the evacuation, and the message was passed. The General went on to see Brooke, and Oliver retired to Veterinary-Surgeon Spooner's quarters, had a meal and went to bed.

We should be clear that Veterinary-Surgeon Oliver was a separate person from Major Oliver of the 66th. First reports to reach England unfortunately confused the two, giving the impression that the latter officer had abandoned his regiment in the interests of his personal safety, thereby causing him much unmerited distress.

Primrose approved of Brooke's plan, and agreed that he should set out at once. He urged him, however, to use great caution and avoid any considerable loss of life, as the garrison was now so small that every man counted. So at half-past five, only three-quarters of an hour after hearing Oliver's report, Brooke paraded his relief column on the cantonment square. He was horrified to find that it had not been possible to collect all the men he wanted in the short time available, but had no intention of letting a detail like that delay him in any way. So he decided to start with only forty sabres of the Poona Horse under Captain Anderson; two guns of the field artillery under his friend, Captain Law; seventy men from the 7th Fusiliers and a hundred sepoy of the 28th Native Infantry. He was only anxious about his two guns, as their loss would have put the garrison of Kandahar in a very precarious position.

As he was about to march off, Reid and his improvised advance guard to Burrows's column came riding in. They had seen no enemy at Sinjiri, and had decided to go slowly on to Kandahar instead of waiting for the main body. This was a pity, for if they had stayed they might have prevented a number of sepoy from blundering on up the Arghandab, missing the turn for Kandahar in the darkness.

No sooner had Brooke and his little force left cantonments in column of route than they met a desultory and rather harmless fire from behind the walls of neighbouring gardens. Skirmishers were immediately deployed to the front and cavalry piquets to left and right, causing the rabble opposing them to run for their lives, several being killed as they tried to escape. Now they began to meet the first of a long string of fugitives which was to continue until they reached Kokeran. Brooke says, 'I had never seen the retreat of a panic-stricken military force before, and I trust that I never may do so again, as it is too horrible for

description, and this retreat excelled in terror any that I have ever heard of. All appearance of organization or discipline gone; each man, whether European or native, was fighting, as it were, for his own life, careful of nothing but getting into safety. All were wearied and harassed, and many unable hardly to move one foot before the other.' The large village of Abasabad (now Dand) was cleared and the force moved on through the open country beyond, sending small parties to clear snipers from the villages on the sides of the road. Two miles further on a considerable force of Afghans had collected on some high ground to the right of the road, but were disconcerted when Law dropped two shells among them 'with charming precision' and broke when the infantry came close enough for volleys. Some tried to cross the road and shelter in the hills to the left, which was exactly what Brooke had hoped for – he loosed the cavalry, who charged with excellent effect, causing considerable execution. Brooke rather felt that he should have stopped and taken the hill by the point of the bayonet, but excuses himself by the need to avoid casualties. So long as the aim could be achieved by artillery and long-range rifle-fire, he was perfectly content.

There was no more opposition until Kokeran, which was run of enemy who had been tormenting stragglers all morning. But here, also, Brooke knew his ground well from all his riding-parties, and occupied a commanding position with an all-round view of the plain. From here he spotted a mass of men by the Arghandab, who could only be the remains of the Maiwand brigades. He at once sent Anderson and his squadron to by-pass the village and join Burrows, to tell him that the road through Kokeran should be clear in about twenty minutes. However, the Afghans realized that Brooke's position rendered Kokeran untenable, and cleared off without waiting for an assault on the village. Some of them occupied a strong defensive area to the north, right of Brooke's line of advance, but a few shells and the threat of infantry action proved sufficient to dislodge them. Burrows was then able to come on along a safe road.

So the two columns met – the miserable remnants from Maiwand, and the little relieving force. From the Arghandab came a sad procession, many wounded, all nearly exhausted.

The gun-carriages were loaded with sick, wounded, dead and dying; the wretched horses dying themselves of thirst and fatigue hardly able to drag them along. 'Many poor fellows, wounded almost to death, trying with a terrible anxiety to cling to the back of a horse or a camel, knowing too well the fate that would await them if they failed to keep their seats.' Now there was some relief, as Brooke had the forethought to bring with him twenty-five doolies, and into these were placed the most seriously wounded; others were put upon Law's gun-carriages. Almost last of all, followed only by Mayne and Geoghegan and their sowars, came Brigadier-General Burrows. He broke down completely when he saw Brooke, and could not even speak. His friend made him get off his horse and take a little whisky and water, and a bit of biscuit, and then he became more composed.

The time came to start back to Kandahar. Brooke let the last straggler pass and gain a half-mile lead before coming slowly back. He recalled his cavalry from the Arghandab a mile away, but the enemy, emboldened as always by the sight of withdrawal, rushed down in large numbers from the hills to cut them off. Anderson was in no way daunted, formed up his squadron and charged. He cut his path through without difficulty, slaying many Afghans, but was so unlucky as to lose his best man, left lying among the enemy. Brooke would again have liked to stay and teach the tribesmen a lesson, but knew that it might entail an unnecessary loss of life to his own troops, so denied himself the pleasure. There was no trouble for the next three miles, but then Burrows was held up around Abasabad, which the enemy had reoccupied. Brooke passed through, dispersed the Afghans with shell-fire, then cleared the village with skirmishers, before allowing Burrows to complete an unmolested journey to Kandahar. By that time Brooke had covered fourteen miles, nearly every inch of which had to be contested or defended, for the loss of one man killed and two or three slightly wounded – the pay-off for suppressing his natural aggressive tendencies!

Burrows's column passed cantonments at two o'clock and reached the citadel of Kandahar an hour later. At one time the column had stretched for twelve miles from head to tail, portions of it in organized groups, others making their way as

best they could. Lieutenant-Colonel Anderson of the Bombay Grenadiers, severely wounded and on a stretcher, had served as a focal point for his men, a body of whom marched by him. More of his regiment arrived in Kandahar throughout the day in twos and threes, two hundred and seventy in all, some of them handing in a total of a thousand pounds worth of rupees that they had saved from the treasure. The surviving half-company of Henn's Sappers and Miners collected together outside the city gates to smarten themselves up, and then marched in as a formed body of men. They received nothing but praise for their conduct, both in battle and on the long road back.

4

After Brooke's departure from Kandahar, Major Adam and the senior medical officer, Surgeon-General O'Nial, had collected all the transport that they could lay hands on and had set out for cantonments to bring in all the stores and equipment that they could find. Soon, still early in the morning, long trains of laden camels, mules and donkeys were wending their way back to Kandahar on specific routes chosen by Adam to avoid confusion and to ensure an even flow of traffic. Unfortunately, like so many movement orders, the plan was spoilt. Brooke, before departing, had ordered that every gate into Kandahar was to be closed and barricaded, except for the north, or Idgah Gate. As a result, disorganized streams of transport animals and their drivers had formed a struggling and vociferous mass around the one narrow entrance, and more were arriving with every minute. Adam rode off to the citadel to appeal to Primrose, who refused utterly to make any change to the instructions issued by his brigadier-general. So the major rode back to restore what order he could. When he reached the gate, he found that the sutlers and shopkeepers who had set up their establishments in cantonments had joined the throng. They had obtained transport through the connivance of their friends and relations among the locally enlisted staff of the commissariat department, and were trying frantically to fight or bribe their way through the throng

and get their goods to the safety of their city stores. The more truculent local villagers now opened up on the crowd with long-range musket fire, which caused additional confusion. They were soon silenced by a few rounds from the artillery, but the noise of the guns startled some of the baggage animals, who broke loose – helped by their locally-hired drivers – and disappeared among the distant houses.

All the time, stragglers from the Maiwand brigades were limping in, not the comparatively disciplined men of the main body, but those wretches, cavalry and infantry, who had no thought but for themselves. Then came an additional complication, the arrival of a whole wing from the 28th Bombay Native Infantry with all their baggage, stores and equipment, ammunition carts and ponies. What a welcome for them to Kandahar after their long journey up from the south! The men must have looked askance at the maelstrom of pushing, jostling bodies around the Idgah Gate. They would have been shocked at the sight of the Maiwand fugitives, who would have soon started to regale them with terribly exaggerated tales of defeat and misery.

However, their arrival was most opportune for Adam, who obtained their assistance in sorting out the trouble, and posted traffic police to prevent any repetition of the disorder. He then returned to cantonments, only to find that Brooke, before he had left, had issued orders for the troops remaining there – the 4th, and the rest of the 28th Native Infantry – to deploy across the road before Abasabad. Seeing cantonments left empty, the villagers had seized the opportunity to rush in among the deserted barracks to pillage and burn. They had already made away with all the men's kit, which had been collected and stored centrally, and had set light to the engineer depot in which all explosives and defence stores were kept. The marauders were eventually driven off, but nothing from the depot could be saved.

All this took time, and soon Burrows's main body was passing cantonments on its way to Kandahar. Guides were waiting by the Idgah Gate to take them to the positions allocated to them by Primrose, who had spent the morning making the arrangements. There was more delay, as many of the survivors, once they knew that they were safe, sank to the ground and refused

to make any more effort to help themselves. But they were sorted out, and the way cleared. For the wounded, excellent dispositions had been made by the senior medical officer. With considerable forethought, he had arranged several days previously for tents to be pitched on empty squares inside the citadel, and had furnished them with beds and chattis – earthenware jars of cool water.

Primrose sent Brooke a message instructing him to supervise the final evacuation of cantonments, so he stopped there on his way back. He was furious to find that so little had been done during his absence. The Afghans were cleared out, and kept away by piquets and the occasional counter-thrust, and work began. Brooke spared nobody, and there was soon a continuous flow of animals to and from Kandahar. He was pestered continually by Primrose, urging him to stop and come back to the citadel, but stayed until a quarter past six. He was the last man into the citadel, and the gates were closed behind him. He had a hurried dinner with Primrose, and then went the rounds of the ramparts and guards, getting to bed at one o'clock in the morning. At midnight, while he was still making his rounds, distant shots were heard from the north-west. About a hundred and fifty sepoy from Jacob's Rifles and the Grenadiers who had led the rabble element of the retreat, disorganized and without a British officer, had lost their way at Sinjiri and had carried on up the west bank of the Arghandab. They discovered their mistake at daylight, and lay concealed until nightfall, when they tried to make their way over the Baba Wali Pass to Kandahar, only to be intercepted by Afghans and wiped out to a man. Thus may have ended the sad story of Cole's broken companies and the first, disordered groups from the Bombay Grenadiers.

A message was sent to Simla: 'Total defeat and dispersion of General Burrows's force. Heavy loss in both officers and men. General Primrose has evacuated cantonments and brought all his troops into citadel. Officers and men returning in small parties. Colonel St John safe.'

After the return of the Maiwand brigades, the Kandahar garrison had four hundred and fifty sick and wounded men to care for, leaving three thousand, two hundred and fifty bayonets to defend the walls and maintain a central reserve. Despite the edicts of the text-books, it was decided that the whole city should be defended, not only the citadel, a perimeter of six thousand yards. However, under these circumstances it was impossible to accept the risk of an uprising by the militant Moslem portion of the inhabitants, so Brooke and Burrows urged Primrose to order the expulsion of all male Pathans of fighting age from the city. The general sent them both to see St John and the Wali, who gave way after a very heated argument. The proclamation was made, with a warning that the death penalty would be imposed on any man found still in his home after six days. As a result twelve thousand left the city without protest, and only a further seven hundred had to be expelled forcibly.

Brooke adopted a policy of aggressive defence, sallying out to punish any large body of enemy who dared to come too close to the walls. In any case, he had started his long-thwarted programme of extensive demolitions all around the perimeter, and usually had to fight for the enclosures he wanted to destroy. One of these occasions, on 12 August, almost developed into a pitched battle, the enemy losing sixty men and a very important personage, the Governor of Farah; British casualties were also heavy. The city walls were put in as good a state of defence as possible, which involved a lot of hard work. It had not been forgotten that in 1842 the Afghans had nearly succeeded in gaining entry by heaping brushwood faggots soaked in oil against the Herat gate, and burning it down. So now all the gates were covered in sheet iron to make sure that this did not happen again. Broken walls were repaired, wire entanglements were constructed all around the perimeter, brickwork was knocked down to improve fields of fire. Ramps were built so that E/B's 9-pounders and the only remaining smooth-bore 6-pounder gun could join the four 40-pounder Armstrong breech-loading rifled guns on the walls;

silent registration was carried out, and range cards were prepared. Not one of the four Royal Horse Artillery officers who had brought E/B into action at Maiwand was left. Blackwood and Osborne were dead, Maclaine was a prisoner in enemy hands and Fowell was badly wounded. So the guns were now commanded by the officers of the smooth-bore battery, except for Faunce, who had gone with his men to rejoin the survivors of the 66th Foot. Slade found himself in charge of the guns on the west wall, assisted by Jones and Fowle, under the overall command of Burrows, while Griffith of the Grenadiers was responsible for one of its gates. Nuttall held the east wall, helped by Mainwaring. Brooke had the south, while Primrose himself took the north wall.

Ayub Khan had been delayed at Maiwand as the various factions of his army quarrelled over the spoil. This gave him time to do what he could for his wounded, and to bury his dead. Fifteen hundred of his regular troops had been killed and 'numberless' ghazis, probably between three and four thousand. It took seven days before they were all interred, or carried away by their relatives. The British dead were left to rot where they fell. When he marched, fifteen hundred seriously wounded had to be left behind.

His advance guard began to arrive outside Kandahar on 5 August and his main force came in on the 7th. Next day there began a desultory bombardment which went on for weeks, but had little effect on the garrison, protected by their thick walls. The Kandahar artillery, however, watched while Ayub Khan set up his camp in the old cantonments, and then shelled him out of it with the Armstrongs, setting numbers of tents on fire. He shifted to the far side of Abasabad, where it was still possible to hit the camp at a range of five thousand yards, but the firing attracted some rather accurate Afghan counter-battery shelling, and was not judged worth continuing.

The so-called siege of Kandahar had now begun, but as in the case of many other sieges the investment was not complete. Patrols of Nuttall's cavalry sallied out through the Idgah Gate every day, and the same portal was used to dispose of refuse, which was buried in trenches outside, and to obtain water for

the horses and transport animals. There was an adequate supply of drinking water for the men. Adam, who had at first feared that he would have to rely on two reservoirs of green insect-infested liquid in the citadel, found that it was commonplace for households in the town to have excellent wells dug in their courtyards. Food there was in plenty, but grain and hay for animals had to be rationed; so to ease the strain two hundred and fifty broken-down camels were driven out to fend for themselves.

On 13 August, Ayub Khan occupied Khairabad, a village north-east of the city, and Deh Kwaja, another large one opposite the northern half of the east wall. Information was received that he was preparing scaling ladders to assault in this sector, as the east wall was only fifteen feet high in some places. And next day five hundred regular troops and two guns were seen to move into Deh Kwaja. Primrose became worried, and it was only with difficulty that Adam dissuaded him from barricading the Idgah Gate with its essential administrative facilities.

Colonel Hills, Commander of the Royal Engineers, now produced a plan for a sortie to General Primrose. The cavalry were to slip out through the Idgah Gate before dawn and make a wide circuit around Khairabad and Deh Kwaja, taking up a position south of the latter village to prevent any reinforcements entering it from that direction. A brigade of infantry would go out by the same route, followed by two field guns, while the rest of the artillery stayed silent on the walls to preserve surprise until the enemy woke up to what was going on; after which they would give support as necessary. The three infantry regiments were to rush Khairabad, which was not believed to be held in any great strength, and evict the garrison. They were then to swing south and force their way right through Deh Kwaja from north to south, as all the defence was concentrated on the western houses and enclosures facing Kandahar's Kabul Gate; while their own artillery took these western defenders in enfilade. The infantry would destroy any troops or guns that they found in their way, demolish any loop-holed walls opposite Kandahar, and then return through the Kabul Gate in the centre of the city's east wall, which would be opened for the purpose.

Primrose was impressed by the plan; and as soon as he was alone he sent for Brooke to ask his views. But the brigadier-general had already made up his mind that sorties of this nature only resulted in unnecessary casualties and a loss of morale among the men, and advised against it. He did not think that the advantages to be gained would be commensurate with the inevitably high losses in dead and wounded. The attack was called off, but Primrose had not forgotten about it, and was inclined to be attracted to the idea. So when, six days later, the Chief of Royal Engineers approached him again on the grounds that he had been prevented by hostile fire from Deh Kwaja from carrying out some essential demolitions outside the Kabul Gate, he decided that a sortie would now take place. He sent for Brooke, told him that he would be in charge of the operation, to prepare his own plan and present it at a conference to be held that afternoon. Brooke was even more against the sortie than he had been before, as he knew that the Afghans had been busy fortifying Deh Kwaja all week. However, as he was to command the sortie, he felt that he could not possibly argue against it; all he could do was to produce his suggestions for carrying it out.

The conference was attended by Burrows, Nuttall, Colonel French, the Commander of Royal Artillery, and others. Primrose had specifically not invited Hills, the originator of the idea, to avoid unpleasant argument. Brooke retained much of the cavalry portion of Hills's plan but altered almost everything else, even insisting on a preliminary bombardment. The latter idea so horrified Adam, who was not even an official member of the conference, but was in the same room listening, that, according to Colonel Hanna, 'Adam could contain himself no longer. "For Heaven's sake," he exclaimed, "don't let there be a preliminary bombardment. If there is to be a sortie, let it be a surprise with the bayonet, and having captured the enemy's guns, retire quickly into the city." For a moment Brooke stared at the audacious speaker, and then, turning to Primrose, said deliberately: "Sir, I wish the guns to open before the attack is made," and Primrose answered, "Certainly; see to this, Colonel French." '

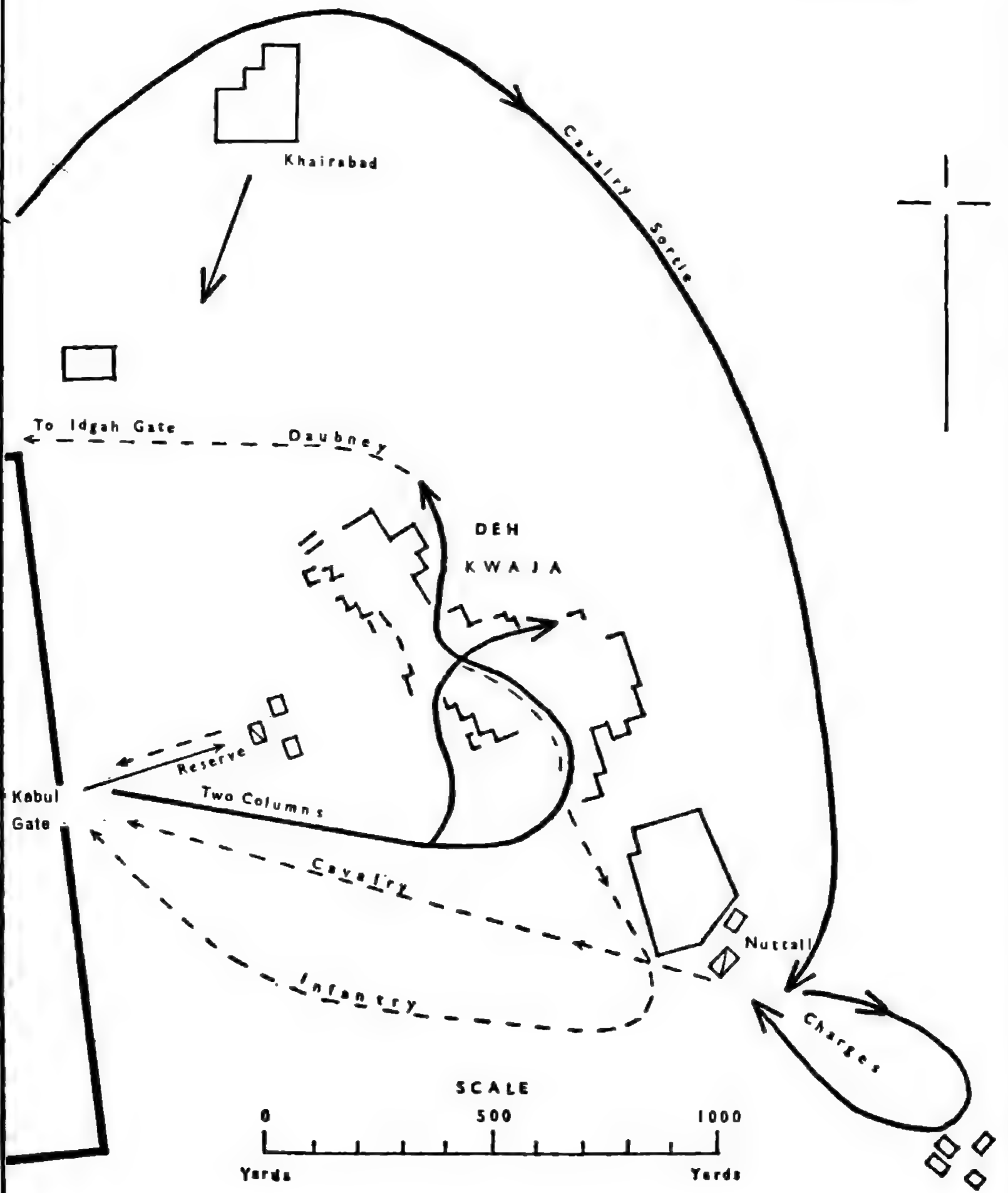
At four o'clock next morning, 16 August, Nuttall with a hundred sabres each from the 3rd Light Cavalry, including Mayne and Geoghegan, and the Poona Horse, slid out through the Idgah Gate and trotted unseen around to the north of Khairabad to their position south-east of Deh Kwaja. At the Kabul Gate were assembled under Brooke, as sortie commander, three hundred of the 7th Fusiliers and five hundred of the 19th and 28th Bombay Native Infantry. They were organized into two attacking columns, and a reserve which also included a hundred sabres of the Sind Horse under Malcolmson.

At a quarter to five the bombardment of Deh Kwaja began, and continued for half an hour. At the first salvo every Afghan for miles around stood to his arms, while hundreds of ghazis from the enemy's southern encampment ran towards the sound of the guns. Then, seeing what was afoot, they rushed to help the threatened garrison of the village. They were quickly bundled back to the protection of some enclosures south-east of the Deh Kwaja complex by a spirited charge by Geoghegan and his squadron. A feature that had not been foreseen, however, was that Nuttall and his cavalry not only prevented reinforcements from getting in to Deh Kwaja, which was intended, but also obliged the inhabitants to remain inside. At the start of the shelling most of the garrison deserted their posts with the usual Afghan discretion and tried to get away to the east. But on finding that their retreat was cut off and that it was not possible to do the sensible thing, their hereditary valour immediately reasserted itself and they turned back to their loopholes to fight to the last and sell their lives as dearly as they could.

The British assault columns moved out through the Kabul Gate at half-past five, and came under heavy fire as soon as they got into the open. They had seven hundred yards to go, but never faltered, though men soon began to fall. They pressed on, one column to enter Deh Kwaja from the south and push through to the north, the other to force a way in through the centre of the defences by the west gate and penetrate to the eastern edge.

DEH KWAJA

16 August 1880



Both were to return by the same routes, so had been ordered to leave small parties at salient features to secure their retreat.

Nuttall had to order another charge to drive back ghazis trying to get through to the village in even greater strength than before, and the second charge was driven home with just as great an impetus as the first. Mayne and Geoghegan led their squadrons resolutely against seven hundred ghazis, cutting many of them down and pursuing them back to their enclosures. Two of the enemy fell to Mayne's sword, while Geoghegan, an officer of exceptionally good physique, slew no less than five with his own hand before his horse was once more killed beneath him. But although no Afghans succeeded in getting through to Deh Kwaja, resistance in the village was so resolute and desperate that the British columns began to dwindle, more and more men had to be left to secure the retreat, and ammunition began to run short. No sooner were the Afghans evicted from one enclosure than they ran to take up equally strong positions in the next; and as soon as a house was vacated by the advancing columns, they were back there in strength.

The reserve column had received no orders, but had on their own initiative advanced to within three hundred yards of the Deh Kwaja walls, where they halted under such cover as they could find. Two companies were sent to support Nuttall, and their well-controlled volleys played a great part in repulsing the ghazis from the south. The others came under heavy fire, and many were hit, including Malcolmson, who was wounded.

Brooke now sent his brigade-major, Captain Leckie, to ask for further orders and to arrange for more ammunition to be sent up. There was no immediate urgency, but Primrose decided that the time had come to call it a day. He therefore ordered buglers to sound the retreat from the battlements of Kandahar – thereby informing friend and foe alike that the sortie had failed. According to Colonel Hanna's history: 'In vain Hills entreated to be allowed to take out a few men to support the retreat, Primrose declared that not a man should go, the loss had been heavy enough already, and "It is all your doing," he cried. "I am damned if it is," retorted the indignant Engineer. "You have done everything I told you decidedly and strongly was not to be

done – bombardment, small force, separate attacks, and the wrong end of the village, and you never informed me of all these changes. I told you, moreover, that it was no child's play, this sortie, and that if you did take it up, it must be carried out thoroughly and with every available man." ' This tirade only embittered Hills's relations with the general and did nothing to shake his determination to leave the troops in Deh Kwaja to extricate themselves as best they could. He sent orderlies to Brooke and Nuttall to confirm his order by bugle-call.

Brooke had fought the battle on foot. In any case, his horse had broken loose while he was dismounted at the beginning of the fighting in the village, and had galloped back to Kandahar. He was with Daubeney, commanding officer of the 7th Fusiliers, when he heard the bugle from their position in the very north of Deh Kwaja, and started immediately to arrange the withdrawal. He told Daubeney to fight his way out to the north and get back to Kandahar by the Idgah Gate. He then returned through the village to organize the retreat of the other column through the south end, and sent a written note to Nuttall, who had been put under his command, asking him to cover their withdrawal. Nuttall received the message, but within minutes Primrose's orderly came up with peremptory orders to escort the reserve force to the Kabul Gate without delay, and he felt that he had no option but to obey. Immediately he left his post, the ghazi swarms that he had been containing rushed across to Deh Kwaja to join in the fighting and harry the retreat. But Brooke's men were undaunted and continued to fight their way to safety, yard by yard. Brooke never expected to get clear, and said so to Sergeant-Major Rickard of the 7th Fusiliers who stayed by him throughout the action. He was also seriously handicapped through personally helping to carry Captain Cruickshank of the Royal Engineers who had been badly wounded while blowing up houses in the centre of the village. The captain begged Brooke to leave him, but the brigadier-general would hear of no such thing. Despite all this, however, the party managed somehow to make their way to the south end of the enclosures, and even a hundred yards beyond. Then, suddenly, there was heavy fire from the walls they had just vacated, and

Brooke fell dead, shot through the back below the neck. The men with him tried to retrieve his body, but had to give way in face of a furious ghazi charge, abandoning Cruickshank to his fate. They kept their formation and fired volley after disciplined volley into the ranks of their pursuers, who failed to break them as they slowly made their way back to the Kabul Gate. Leach, Adam and other officers, without leave dashed out from the gate to help the wounded, while two medical officers took stretchers several hundred yards back towards Deh Kwaja, but could not find Brooke or any wounded men before they were driven in.

Daubeny's column had to fight their way through ghazis issuing from Khairabad, which had not been molested, but he succeeded in getting most of his men back through the Idgah Gate.

The artillery on the walls covered the retreat of both columns as best they could. On the western ramparts Slade and his guns silenced the Afghan batteries and broke up Ayub Khan's attempts to form up his bands for an assault on the city.

By half-past seven in the morning it was all over. In the two hours of fighting Brooke's sortie had lost its commander and seven other officers killed, including the colonel of the 28th Native Infantry and one of the chaplains, the Reverend Mr Gordon. Seven more were wounded, two of whom died during the next few days, one of them Colonel Shewell who had survived the cholera outbreak at Eree ka Sher. In all, there had been two hundred and twenty-four casualties, as the enemy had fought with great determination.

There was considerable controversy over whether or not the sortie should have been made, at a time when it was already known that a relief column under General Roberts had left Kabul on 7 August. Perhaps this news had given Primrose the idea that he must do something to retrieve the reputation of the Bombay Army, now tarnished after Maiwand, rather than be accused of sitting and doing nothing. He certainly wanted to pre-empt a general assault from all sides against his thinly-held ramparts. As regards the conduct of the sortie, we do not know Brooke's reasoning behind his plan, as his diary ended two days

before the battle, a day before he was given the task of organizing it. The main reason why casualties were so severe was the staunch resistance of the defenders, which nobody had expected. In previous minor affrays the Afghans had fought well, but not to desperation. It may be that Brooke had insisted on an artillery bombardment hoping that the Deh Kwaja garrison would withdraw from the village to avoid unnecessary losses – which is exactly what they were going to do until they found their retreat menaced by Nuttall's cavalry, and turned to fight. So the one piece of Hills's plan which Brooke had retained in its entirety may have caused his downfall.

As it turned out, the sortie was not a failure. Heavy though the losses had been, it had achieved its aim, and the siege was virtually over. Ayub Khan had lost several high-ranking friends and relatives in Deh Kwaja – and their presence indicates that the village played a major part in his plans for a general assault. Now his regular garrison in the place complained bitterly that they had not been properly supported, and insisted on being withdrawn. His whole army was disconcerted by the magnificent fighting spirit shown by those whom the victors of Maiwand had come to think of as their beaten enemies. Aware that only less than half of the Kandahar garrison had been involved in the morning's fight, and in fear of more sorties, the whole besieging force lay under arms for the next two nights, while the tribesmen from Zamindawar decided quite logically that there was nothing more to be gained and began to drift away back to their mountain fastnesses.

Ayub Khan would have liked now to abandon the siege and return home, as he too knew that Roberts was on his way. He even sent an emissary to try and treat with the general, claiming that Maiwand had not been his fault; Burrows had attacked him – which was perfectly true! The subsequent British defeat had been but the will of God. Roberts was not impressed, and told him to give up his prisoners, including Maclaine – now known to be in his hands – and to surrender unconditionally to the authorities in Kandahar. But even though the Sirdar may have wanted to depart for Herat, the local Kandahari tribesmen were terrified of the revenge that they expected the British to

take if he left them unprotected, and they encamped across the Arghandab at Sinjiri to prevent him leaving. So he stayed in his camp to await events.

In Kandahar, boredom set in among the garrison as the threat receded, and with no prospect of further offensive action. The reaction set in, and the figure for sick and wounded rose to nearly seven hundred men. Then came the flash of a heliograph from the north-east, the first sure information to be received that Roberts was closing in. The siege was now of such an open nature that St John, Leach and Adam were able to ride out with a small escort to meet the advance guard of the Bengal Division. Neither Primrose nor his two surviving brigadier-generals went with them. There was no Brooke to lead the party – ‘about the only man who held his head up through all the Kandahar investment’.

CHAPTER 10

The Battle of Kandahar

1

THE NEWS OF Maiwand reached Sir Donald Stewart from Simla on 28 July, his first meeting with Sirdar Abdur Rahman arranged for only three days later. Sir Donald, who like everyone else was living for the day when he could return home, stopped the withdrawal that had already begun. Long convoys were already filtering down through the passes from Kabul, plodding columns of infantry buoyed up by the prospect of that comparative peace and comfort which even famine-stricken India could provide. With them were strings of slowly pacing camels, their swaying panniers laden with sick and wounded men kept alive by hopes of proper medical attention and convalescence. Now the troops would have to face more hardship, battle and disease. They had no sympathy for the survivors of the disaster. Cursing the Bombay Army for being beaten, sullenly they turned about and retraced their steps. Sir Donald had just written to his wife to say, 'I can hardly believe that we are to get out of this country without trouble, and yet everything looks bright and promising at this moment.' He now wondered what on earth Abdur Rahman would think of it all.

But Abdur Rahman turned out to be an astute and balanced statesman. He knew what he wanted, and what concessions he could expect to wring from the British. With considerable foresight he realized that Ayub Khan, for whom he had no great affection, would suffer for his victory and that it should be treated as a silent bargaining counter, rather than a stick with which to goad his adversaries. He had no desire to delay their departure from his country. Despite the pleas of his adherents, who had precedent for distrusting meetings with the British,

which had on occasion ended with the arrest of the Afghan participants, he rode in to meet Sir Donald, and the talks began. He was tactful and accommodating, and made a very good impression. 'Abdur Rahman is a man of about forty, of middle height, and rather stout. He has an exceedingly pleasant face, brown eyes, a pleasant smile, and a frank courteous manner. . . . In conversation he showed both good sense, and sound political judgement. He kept thoroughly to the point under discussion, and his remarks were characterized by shrewdness and ability.'

Sir Donald's task had in any case been greatly eased. On the fall of the Beaconsfield Government at the end of April, Gladstone had appointed Lord Ripon to replace Lord Lytton, and Sir Donald had found that the new Viceroy's views were in accord with his own ideas. So the meetings rapidly came to a satisfactory conclusion. The Sirdar agreed to rule the country as Amir, accepting the proviso that not only should he place unreservedly all his external affairs in British hands, but that Kandahar should remain in the hands of Wali Sher Ali Khan – once the current, temporary difficulties had been resolved. Both sides realized that there was no point in discussing the future of Herat, where Ayub Khan was still a law unto himself.

Putting his trust in Abdur Rahman's integrity, Sir Donald advised Simla, and received their agreement, that Kandahar could best be relieved from Kabul, rather than to try and push a column up through the physical and climatic problems of the Quetta route from the south. He appreciated also that he had given the local tribes such a caning during his advance that they were unlikely to cause any trouble to a force retracing his path. He decided to send Roberts, and gave him every assistance, even letting him choose the regiments that he would take with him. Roberts then picked his own Bengal Division, after eliminating the Pathan element as much as possible – rather than ask them to fight against their cousins in Ayub Khan's army. On arrival in Kandahar Roberts was to have a free hand and complete control, both military and political, in South Afghanistan. Lord Ripon and Sir Donald laid down categorically, however, that there were to be no reprisals against any of the chiefs or villagers, or even against the Wali's mutinous army; but that he was to

confine himself to the dispersal of those actually bearing arms against the British Government. On no account were there to be executions or destruction of villages, such as had led to the December revolt around Kabul.

The famous march began on 7 August, and was one of bitter hardship. Hot days were followed by freezing nights, there was shortage of food, scarcity of water; but notwithstanding these problems a daily average of nearly thirteen miles was maintained. As expected, there was no opposition.

2

General Sir Frederick Roberts stayed long enough in Khelat-i-Ghilzai to give his column a day's rest, and then marched on again taking the garrison with him – two companies of the 66th Foot, enough to turn the regiment into a viable fighting entity once more, the 2nd Baluchis, and the hundred-strong detachment of the Sind Horse.

He rode into Kandahar at seven o'clock on the morning of 31 August, and was met by Primrose, Burrows, the Wali and his retinue in full regalia. He was not impressed, and described what he saw as a demoralized garrison which had made feeble and ineffectual attempts to break out. The troops seemed to consider themselves as hopelessly beaten and were utterly despondent.

By ten o'clock Roberts had his 1st and 3rd Infantry Brigades moving out of the city, and by early afternoon his reconnaissance group was in action against Ayub Khan's outposts. Next morning he paraded his division before dawn and thoroughly checked all arms and equipment. Then he fell them out for a good breakfast while he held his orders group. At half-past seven o'clock he began the battle of Kandahar.

The Bombay Army were to take part in the fight. Burrows's brigade took the field a thousand strong, consisting of four companies of the 66th Foot under Major Oliver; two companies, which were all that could be raised, from the Bombay Grenadiers – who had begun the Maiwand battle with six hundred and

forty-nine rank and file; and three companies of Jacob's Rifles. Daubeney, now commanding the 2nd Infantry Brigade in place of Brooke, was able to raise over fifteen hundred men; and Nuttall, reinforced by the Poona Horse and the Sind Horse detachment from Khelat-i-Ghilzai, could muster seven hundred and twenty-five sabres. So the total strength of the Bombay Division alone was larger than that of Burrows at Maiwand. E/B, the Royal Horse Artillery Battery, had been rewarded for their exploits by being transferred to General Gough's Cavalry Brigade of the Bengal Division. In addition to the Kandahar garrison, Roberts had at his disposal the Bengal Division of three British, three Gurkha and seven Indian infantry regiments, together with four cavalry regiments, making his total force nearly five times the size of that which fought at Maiwand, and equal this time to Ayub Khan in artillery.

Ayub Khan's army numbered by now less than thirteen thousand – half what he had at Maiwand. His regular element was unchanged, except for losses sustained in battle; but many of his ghazis and tribesmen had faded away to their homes with their booty, their blood-lust slaked – some to brag of their valour, others sadly carrying back the bodies of friends and relatives to the home villages for burial. He still had numbers slightly superior to those of Sir Frederick Roberts, but fifteen hundred Kizilbashis and Kohistanis had heard about Abdur Rahman's succession and were inclined to support him. They sent word to St John that they would desert as soon as the British attack was launched.

The day began with an attack by the discredited Bombay Division on the enemy's left flank opposite Baba Wali. But this was really in the nature of a feint, and as soon as it had gained Ayub Khan's attention the real assault was made on the Afghan right. The enemy fought gallantly, but had no chance against Sir Frederick. A wiry little man, he sat upright in his saddle despite the illness from which he had been suffering for more than a week, directing the battle and occasionally refreshing himself from a bottle of champagne which he had strapped to his saddle. Ayub Khan was quick to assess the inevitable outcome, for which he had probably made contingency plans. He quietly

disengaged his regular troops, sending his cavalry off to Herat along the Girishk road, while his infantry retreated with all Afghan speed into the Khakrez Hills. The ghazis and tribesmen unwittingly aided his escape by fighting on for a little longer, until they too melted away into the hills – or at the wave of a hand became innocent and inoffensive villagers, unarmed and welcoming! By two o'clock the Bombay Army Cavalry Brigade was able to cross the Baba Wali Pass and pursue up the Arghandab Valley, charging and dispersing the retreating enemy. Mayne and Geoghegan alone each killed two Afghans during the operation. When night came they had reached Mansurabad, fifteen miles distant, and then returned to Kandahar, which they reached at ten o'clock. They had three sowar casualties, the only losses to the Bombay Division in its static role. The Bengal Division had to fight very hard, and carried the day with a loss of forty killed and two hundred and twenty-eight wounded – three per cent of the total force.

Ayub Khan lost his camp and baggage, including the two E/B guns taken at Maiwand, and twelve hundred killed, ghazis and regulars. The Bengal cavalry, suffering from the heat and stale after their long march, were held up by ghazis amid bad ground and failed to intercept more than stragglers, while the Herati cavalry drew steadily away down the road to Girishk, Farah and home. They were forbidden by order to molest several bands of peaceful, weaponless countrymen trudging harmlessly through the paddy-fields.

The story of Maclaine ended in Ayub Khan's camp. He had been taken prisoner near Sinjiri when he had gone away from the column to find water for the wounded. The circumstances are not clear, but it seems that he was lured into a house, then hemmed in and unable to get away again. He was roughly treated at first, and there were three healed wounds on his body which had been inflicted by ghazis at play, probably during the early days of his imprisonment in Kokeran. A week later the Khan of Kokeran arrived home. He was none other than the Sirtip, Sirdar Nur Mahommed Khan, who had in happier days made Maclaine's acquaintance socially in Kandahar, and from then on the young officer received better treatment in the Afghan nobleman's

own bungalow. Ayub Khan had him collected from Kokeran on 6 August, and held him in his camp, but continued to treat him well. St John offered Nur Mahommed Khan's son, who had been imprisoned in retaliation for the Sirtip's defection, as an exchange but the offer was refused; Ayub Khan hoped to reap some personal benefit from any transaction.

Maclaine's guard of regular soldiers fled in the hour of the Sirdar's defeat, leaving him unharmed and free. Unfortunately, although normally a strong man, he was weakened by his wounds and from illness; he had slipped out of a convalescent camp to avoid missing the Girishk column. A passing ghazi noticed him when he came out of his tent and attacked him with such savagery that he was unable to put up a successful resistance, although some sepoy prisoners in better health managed to escape alive.

His dead body, still warm, was found with its throat cut outside his little tent near that of Ayub Khan. He was buried with military honours in Kandahar.

CHAPTER 11

Hindsight

1

THE LESSONS OF the Maiwand campaign have been covered to some degree in the preceding chapters; but over many events, particularly during the battle itself, it has been considered more important to maintain continuity of action rather than to stop for discussion. One dislikes to pontificate from the wisdom of hindsight, but past histories have given such confused accounts of the conduct of the battle and the behaviour of the troops that some amplification seems to be in order.

The causes leading up to the second Afghan War have been dealt with in sufficient detail, as have the reasons why the Bombay Army found itself providing the garrison for Kandahar. So we start where Sirdar Sher Ali Khan was appointed Wali of the province under Her Majesty Queen Victoria, Empress of India. The Government of India had gone to considerable trouble and expense in rupees and weaponry to install him, and all was well until rumours began to circulate about Ayub Khan's projected invasion from Herat. The Wali then not unnaturally decided to defend his new realm on its borders instead of sitting eighty miles away in his capital city. Unfortunately he was not Kandahari-born and was surrounded by his own friends and sycophants, so he made a very poor appreciation on the loyalty of his infantry and greatly underestimated their hatred of the occupation forces. None the less, when he decided on vigorous constructive action to overawe his vassals around the Helmand, it would have been quite wrong to stand in his way without very good reasons – which it would have been difficult to produce. It was a pity that immediately on his arrival he set about antagonizing the Zamindawar by trying to collect their

taxes – that surely could have waited – but it would have made no difference in the long run. The tribesmen were out for blood.

Now we come to the vexed question of whether his request for British support at Girishk should have been granted, and to what degree. One feels that the Wali had the right to demand help. If it were to be denied, Simla had good reason to suppose that he might throw in his lot with Ayub Khan. St John knew that he would be most unlikely to do anything of the sort, but believed in supporting him anyway. Considering the state of the country, a viable force could not have been less than an infantry brigade with at least one cavalry regiment and some artillery; and a body of the same size would probably have been enough to cope with the mutineers, as the Wali's mounted arm remained faithful to him.

After dispersing the army which he was supposed to be supporting, using his initiative to disobey direct orders not to cross the Helmand River, Burrows had no clear directive. He could not stay where he was at Girishk as the country had been denuded of supplies. There was nothing to stop him going all the way back to Kandahar if he wanted to – a course favoured by the Wali and some of his own staff. But he probably felt that he should at least fight some sort of delaying action in a suitable position; and Biddulph had already recommended in his report that if the Helmand line should be untenable, the next suitable defensive position was between Khushk-i-Nakhud and Karez-i-Ata. So there he went, to await the approaching invaders, and to arrange reinforcement and replenishment along his shortened line of communication with Kandahar. He also hoped to send back to the city his many sick, and thin down his enormous baggage train.

Then came trouble in the form of a new directive from Simla. He was allowed to attack Ayub Khan on his own responsibility – which was fair enough; he had intended to do so under the right conditions. However, he was as good as ordered to prevent the Sirdar at all costs from 'passing on to Ghazni'; and he could not do this from Khush-i-Nakhud as there was a perfectly feasible route from the Helmand to Ghazni through Maiwand

and up the Khakrez Valley, completely by-passing Kandahar. So he must have realized that eventually he would be compelled to move north to Maiwand and block the road; but he did not think that there was any immediate urgency. One convoy had come up from Kandahar, and he was waiting for another to arrive before using the combined escorts to go back down the road with those elements of his column which were being such a hindrance to him. It was, after all, only a morning's march to Maiwand.

He was very reluctant to move before this happened, and as a result insisted on such cast-iron certainty of Ayub Khan's intentions as to pose a problem to the best of intelligence organizations. His own rigid and unimaginative intelligence collection plan was so lacking in initiative and aggression that it failed to produce the answer in time. Even then, when at last persuaded that he could stay no more, he would have arrived in time to forestall the Sirdar at Maiwand if he had been able to set out at Sir Donald Stewart's routine hour of half-past four in the morning; or if he had marched his fighting echelon at normal speed and left the baggage to catch up in its own time.

We now come to the encounter and the opening phases of the battle. Visibility was poor, but Burrows appreciated quite rightly that he was in contact with Ayub Khan's whole army, and that it was going to get to Maiwand before he did. He would fail completely in his aim unless he was able to divert the Afghan army, and the only way to do so was to launch a strong attack from the line of march. In this he succeeded, and dangled before Ayub Khan's eyes a prize that the Sirdar was unable to resist – he stopped his march on Maiwand and turned to fulfil the will of Allah and destroy the little British force. But Burrows was occupying an untenable defensive position in the middle of an open plain, and facing much greater odds than had Sir Donald at Ahmad Khel. It was a situation where every conceivable advantage had to be exploited to the full if the British column was to survive, let alone win the battle, and one calling for the highest skill in commanding a mixed group of infantry, cavalry and artillery.

There seems no doubt that Burrows, when he left the knoll,

was going to reconnoitre a defensive position based on Mundabad and the ravine. Then he found that Nuttall and Blackwood had gone a lot further forward than he had anticipated, and that a battle might be starting in his absence; so he changed his mind and set off for the front without delegating the reconnaissance to anybody else – unless it was for this reason that Malcolmson kept appearing and disappearing throughout the battle! It is fair to assume, however, that the force commander intended to attract the Afghans towards himself, and then withdraw on to a good defensive position once the enemy leader was fully committed. The Afghans would certainly have followed him if he had carried out a disciplined withdrawal. They were never able to resist following-up a retreating foe. Then at the village he would have had good natural defences, all his reserve ammunition and supplies, a regiment of cavalry and the equivalent of a wing of infantry. There should have been no difficulty in getting the troops back if he had started before some elements had become demoralized. But this never happened, because he waited until some of his younger soldiers showed such signs of unsteadiness that he dared not move them at all, much less initiate a withdrawal in the face of the enemy – an operation calling for the highest training and discipline – for fear of it degenerating into a rout. He could not even regroup his infantry into a formation for all-round defence, and he had committed his reserve infantry in the early stages, leaving himself no dismounted element with which to influence the battle – except for the baggage guard, equivalent in strength to half a regiment; but he never sent for it.

There was plenty of cavalry, misemployed and doing nothing, being whittled away by enemy gunfire as were Mayne and Smith, but Burrows made no use of them. It is fair to suppose that he held them back to begin with for fear that a successful charge might deter Ayub Khan from turning to the attack. This may have been why he was so perturbed about Maclaine's aggressive action. But later he became so involved in the infantry battle that he was quite unable to think about anything else.

The decisive factor was the Afghan artillery – lots of it, and very well handled. The Kizilbash guns inflicted terrible casualties

on the British left and centre. This was the main reason why Cole's young Pathans broke and fled – the contributory factor being the sight of massed foot-soldiers and horsemen closing slowly in upon them. Burrows had sat and waited for them to come, trying no counter-offensive of his own after his trial advance with the Grenadiers. One wonders what might have happened if he had taken a more robust attitude.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that Malcolmson had not arrived in time to stop E. V. P. Monteith's charge from the baggage area. We know that the charge would have been pressed home. These were the same men who had charged vast numbers at Khushk-i-Nakhud a year earlier. The same squadron charged superior numbers later in the day on the plain between Mundabad and the Khushk-i-Nakhud dry river-bed. On the other hand, the Lui-Naib's cavalry had shown no wish for a battle before Sangbur, and they never once took the offensive throughout Maiwand, other than to snap at the heels of Nuttall's last charge to relieve the Grenadiers. In fact, subsequent admissions have established that they never had any intention of getting involved in hard fighting. There was plenty of room to get away, and that is what they would have done. Monteith and Geoghegan would have sent them flying in all directions, for the whole battlefield to see. Nuttall then could not conceivably have done anything else but mount and charge on his own front, with the same result, clearing the left flank, and causing the most enormous boost to morale. With the cavalry gone, that would have left only the Herati regulars and a swarm of ghazis. The Herati infantry morale was by then at rock-bottom after their repulse by the Grenadiers, and they were very thirsty – there had been no water at Garmao. Their officers were having great difficulty in keeping them on the battlefield. A determined cavalry charge might have turned the scale and sent them running, even the charge of a composite group of squadrons from two different regiments, which was all that Nuttall had. A complete regiment under the command of its own colonel would surely have worked wonders, and restored the fortunes of the day. Ayub Khan would then probably have taken his disgruntled army on to Maiwand, but he never had any intention of going on to North

Afghanistan – we know that. If that had been his aim, he would have acceded to the demands of his Kabulis and gone straight over the mountains from Herat. Sad to say, however, Malcolmson did arrive in time to discipline Monteith.

There was one more occasion when a different decision might have saved the day. That was when the 66th Foot wanted to advance and attack the nullah in front of them, but were refused permission. If the assault had been launched, this first-class regiment, almost unscathed and with morale high, would undoubtedly have attained its objective. They would have suffered heavy casualties during their four to five hundred yard advance over open ground with half the Afghan artillery taking them in enfilade, but the enemy would not have waited for them – there was plenty of room to get away! Even when the 66th surged forward in disorder at the end of the battle, the tribesmen fled before them in consternation. Once on the nullah, the tables would have been turned, and ten Afghan guns would have been within eight hundred yards, some only two hundred yards away. With no cover from their left flank, these gun-positions would have become untenable when the disciplined volleys of rifle-fire from the 66th began to fall among them. A well-timed charge by the British cavalry when they were attempting to limber-up and withdraw might have resulted in their capture. Certainly the threat to the British centre would have been eliminated. However, it was not to be.

A way to summarize Burrows's handling of his column before and during the battle is to consider some of the principles of war, and how he applied them to his problems.

He was not mobile. Sir Donald Stewart sent back through hostile territory from Khelat-i-Ghilzai every sick or weak soldier, follower and transport animal. Ayub Khan dropped his impedimenta at Farah. Burrows wanted to fine down his load, but would not take the risk of sending them under-escorted through unfriendly villages.

On sighting the enemy army, Burrows went immediately on a planned limited offensive to draw Ayub Khan towards him, intending then to withdraw on a good defensive position at Mundaabad. After that, except for an advance by the Grenadiers

which put him off the idea of any further offensive action, he stayed bogged-down where he was, afraid to move a single unit. Ayub Khan could see exactly where every part of the British force was stationed, and planned accordingly. He was given unlimited time to manœuvre a huge, ill-disciplined horde into ponderous action over ground favourable for an assault.

Here for the second time Burrows failed to stick to his original aim. Earlier he had subordinated his absolute priority of blocking the Khakrez road at Maiwand to waiting for a convoy; now he had not fallen back on Mundabad while his troops were still in a fit state to do so. Being tied to his position, his force was not concentrated but split between the battle-line and the baggage echelon.

He never maintained an overall view of the situation nor control over all three of his teeth-arms. The artillery was allowed to do as it wished. No experienced commander would have allowed the smooth-bore battery to leave the field. As he had committed all his reserve before there was the slightest danger to his line, he had no infantry left with which to influence the battle. The forty trained European riflemen and their officer from the smooth-bores would have provided invaluable physical and moral support to Cole's companies.

Neither cavalry regiment was retained intact under its commanding officer. Referring again to the conduct of Ahmad Khel, Sir Donald had split one of his two regiments into sub-units for the various essential tactical tasks, but the 2nd Punjab Cavalry had been kept entire under its colonel – and gallantly he led his men to charge first on one flank, then on the other, to drive the Afghan horsemen from the field of battle.

When the line had given way, and it was nearly too late, then Malcolmson came galloping up to help on his own initiative; not in time to join with Nuttall's charge, which had been ordered at Leach's suggestion. Burrows ignored his cavalry until it was in no condition to help him any more.

Cole's companies of Jacob's Rifles broke and ran before the enemy reached them, passing on their panic to elements of the two native infantry regiments. This is undeniable. However, as we are examining this battle in detail let us look at the chain of reasons which led up to this disastrous climax.

Most of the infantry had been up nearly all of the night, packing and loading in the sticky heat, and some of the sepoys had been without food and water since the previous evening. By the time they left camp the sun had been above the horizon for two hours and the burning heat of the day had begun. They then covered eight miles, some able to obtain water at the halts, but not so the Bombay Grenadiers, eventually to lie on the arid surface of the Maiwand Plain, baking to the thump of their own guns and the burst of enemy shell, with his round ball bounding among them. They were already thirsty before they came up into the line, and all available water was issued; after that the supply was reduced to a trickle and stopped completely when the bhistis were unable or unwilling to face the mile-long perilous journey from the Mundabad Ravine up to the fighting troops.

At noon they deployed for action and were fighting and dying fairly continuously for the next two and a half hours until something had to give way, and the weakest link in the chain snapped. During this time the heat was almost unbelievable, radiating up from the flat kiln of earth and stone, scorching down from a glaring sun, and not a breath of air to cool sweat or blow away the dust and powder-smoke which drifted until they dissipated in the haze, only to be renewed by the next salvo or volley. The effect was to stultify the senses, counteracted at first by the call of action, but the initial exhilaration dulling into a dim and fevered compliance with shouted orders.

Apart from his bodily sufferings, the young native recruit was undergoing the mental shock of being in real action for the first time, and its feeling of dissociation from reality. With stunned horror he saw his comrades and the older soldiers upon whom he relied so much for comfort and example hurled, shattered,

from the ranks, and all the time the menacing hordes of cruel foe surging closer and closer, disappearing out of sight behind his left shoulder, more and more of them all the time, whenever the smoke cleared they seemed nearer. His thirst was dreadful, it was scarcely worth while lifting the red-hot weapon which he did not really know how to use, and in which he had so little confidence. He was not so much afraid, but everything was unreal – strange. His mind whirled, and he did not know what to do, or what was expected of him.

Older soldiers, European and native, had no fear to worry them, and they knew what was going on. But they, too, were doing what was required of them in a torpor, lines of automata rising to fire, lying to reload, up on their feet again – but not all; each time there were more who were never to rise again. Officers did not realize the number of casualties until they looked down to see how many of their men still lay silent and motionless in their places, instead of staggering upright to deliver the volley.

The 66th Foot had been able to drop from the enemy's sight between volleys and his shells and bullets flew harmlessly over their heads. By the crisis of the battle they had only eight men killed and six wounded. Jacob's Rifles also had some cover, though one company commander said that some of his men were lying three-deep to make use of it; but the gully to the north was shallowing rapidly, soon to disappear completely. By the time that the 66th had lost their fourteen men, representing four per cent of their numbers in the line, the six companies of Jacob's Rifles' main body had lost twenty-two per cent.

The Grenadiers and Cole's companies, on the contrary, were right in the open. There were no stones for building sangars, the stone breastworks used in many parts of the North-West Frontier, and if there had been, the damage through rocks splintering when hit by cannon-balls might have offset their practical, if not morale, effect.

The diagram of the final stages of the battle before the line gave way shows how the Grenadiers were closer to most of the Afghan artillery than either of the other two regiments; and the more that Burrows made them lay back their left flank and Cole's companies, the more they became liable to enfilading fire

from the two 3-pounders in the salient and the eight 6-pounder guns north of them. To the Kizilbash gunners they were a target only three to five hundred yards distant, silhouetted against the skyline even when lying down to reload. The line became a slaughter-house. Dead around the regiment lay fifty-four men; twenty-four more were seriously wounded, and could not even be got away to the field hospital; sixty-three wounded had been evacuated or had managed to walk the distance to Mundabad. Cole's companies were in a similar plight, his dead and maimed adding to the general carnage. The Grenadiers had lost thirty per cent of their original strength in the line, one hundred and forty-one killed and wounded. They had done magnificently. Ordered up by Burrows, they had advanced as steadily as on parade and would have gone on right into the Herati lines if need be. After they had been called to a halt because of the furious Afghan defensive cannonade, they fired their volleys with devastating effect into the counter-attacking Afghan regular infantry, driving them from the battleground, delivering a significant blow to their morale. They responded still to their orders, but thirst and fatigue were playing their part; at the back of some minds lay the wistful hope that this ordeal might come to an end, surely there must be a way out?

Cole's companies were worse off for morale. They were two ad hoc groups containing a lot of new recruits and men who had not completed their musketry course, nor even fired ball ammunition. In the ranks of Jacob's Rifles' main body, under easier circumstances, officers were having to bring up the ammunition while the young and untrained crouched miserable and useless in the rear, despite the comfort and discipline of nearly the whole regiment around them. But Cole's men were among strangers, and scarcely knew their officer. He had joined in Kandahar in May, and although he had previously done very well in his language study, had simply not had time to gain the confidence of many of his young Pathans. The advance with the Grenadiers through the Afghan artillery fire had been almost too great an ordeal for beginners in war, and Cole and Burrows had an unpleasant shock when a small tactical move to the rear nearly resulted in a stampede. Leach's steadying influence was

a help. He knew some of the men and, with his reassurance and indomitable will, they pulled themselves together for a time. They were not entirely alone on the left flank; there was a division of British gunners firing away behind them. Then the drum of hooves, the rattle of limbers, and the Europeans jumped up, hooked-in the guns and made off as fast as they could. Was the battle lost? Whether it was or not, here was somebody going away! If the Europeans were leaving the field of battle, why should they stay?

The remainder of the native regiments were not perturbed, as they saw Fowle and his howitzers drop trails again alongside the other smooth-bores. But when at half-past one they saw the whole battery pull out and trot away, they all began to have feelings akin to those of Cole's men. How were they to know that Slade had told the battery to return after getting more ammunition – they never saw them come back!

Cole was killed by artillery fire for all to see. Next fell the senior native officers, leaving only one devoted jemadar to hold two shaking remnants of companies together. Then the ghazis came howling to the assault, in front and behind, and it proved to be too much. Without waiting for them, the sepoy broke and fled in disorder from the line.

The neighbouring company of Grenadiers stood firm, but the panic was infectious. Men in one of the left-centre companies stood up, and others followed their example. An officer tried to stop them, but they did not really understand any more. They had had all that they could take. Others had gone, they were going to get up and walk away from it all. They were stunned, death meant nothing, they had ceased to function. The enemy came among them and they made no resistance as they were dragged from the ranks and butchered.

The main body of Jacob's Rifles followed suit. When an officer remonstrated with them for rising to their feet without orders, they only replied quite calmly that everybody was retiring now. They showed no signs of panic, but pushed and shoved to the right until the 66th, still in first-class fighting trim, were bulldozed from their position.

The 66th Foot had done their duty in the best traditions of

British infantry. Trained and experienced, they had used their new breech-loading rifles to devastating effect against the fanatic swarms breaking fruitlessly against their impregnable defence.

So it is true that the sepoys broke and disorganized the 66th, who were in a condition to go on fighting for hours if need be. But for a hundred years there has been an undercurrent of feeling that all three infantry regiments were operating under similar conditions, which was far from being the case. At the time that the line broke Jacob's Rifles had five, and the Grenadier group twelve times as many casualties as the British regiment.

Late nineteenth-century military doctrine laid down that only first-class West European infantry battalions could be expected to hold firm after suffering thirty per cent casualties. At Maiwand thirty per cent losses had been incurred by the weakest element of the whole force, placed in the position of greatest stress and left there with no attempt to strengthen it or relieve the strain. It was not a first-class West European unit – it was not a first-class anything. It broke.

During the succeeding phases the larger portion of the 66th Foot fought to the last. So did the men of the Grenadiers and Jacob's Rifles who stayed with them. And let us not forget those companies of Grenadiers who regained their balance, lost through no fault of their own, and battled to the end in unbroken squares north of Mundabad. From the Grenadier fighting line of four hundred and seventy, more than half were killed or wounded standing steadfast in their ranks, undauntedly facing overwhelming numbers of a well-armed foe. Perhaps their staunchness and valour might have received more recognition if the defeat at Maiwand had not occurred at such an inconvenient time, putting high office in jeopardy, and if there had been no squalid rivalry between the Bengal and Bombay Armies.



The cavalry had as hard a time as the native infantry, although casualties were not as high as those of the Grenadiers. The 3rd Light Cavalry had slightly less than the main body of Jacob's

Rifles, about one-fifth of their sowars, but they had lost a third of their horses; while the Sind Horse had fewer men killed and wounded, but more horses put out of action – each of which meant a man dismounted and useless for cavalry action. Except for the fortunate sowars who were told to dismount and engage the enemy with carbine fire, there was no lying down for the cavalry. Many of them sat their horses as perfect targets for the Afghan artillery, fully aware that they were performing no useful function. There was never any rest or relaxation, it was infinitely worse than sitting on parade during a *feu-de-joie*. Every time that a shell burst or a ball came plunging over the hard plain, the horses in the vicinity would have reacted by shying or trying to break away; so reins had to be held to keep tension on the horses' mouths, and knees had to be ready to grip at a moment's notice. Nerves of horses and riders became more and more strained. Besides, no soldier liked to see horses killed and maimed, and these sowars would have felt for their mounts more than for themselves. Under the silladar system each man provided his own steed and a battle casualty was a personal loss.

These were some of the factors which changed the victors of Khushk-i-Nakhud and Girishk into surly troopers reluctant to put away carbines and draw swords. Then when they were persuaded to charge, they were let down by their commander, and recalled before they could get to grips with the enemy. Yet they answered the call to charge again, and this time Nuttall, through inexperience, led them off course. After that, sad to say, the sowars were pointing in the direction they wanted to take – to the rear – and there was no turning or stopping them until they reached Slade's gun position on the south bank of the ravine.

The squadrons which had not been subjected to the ordeal in the line behaved in an exemplary manner. E. V. P. Monteith's squadron of the Sind Horse fought a private battle as rear party during the retreat from Mundabad across the plain to the Khushk-i-Nakhud River, exceeding the requirements of duty when necessary. The same applied to Geoghegan's squadron of the 3rd Light Cavalry which shepherded the lagging tail through the enemy villages, well behind the rest of the column and dangerously extended along the road.

Malcolmson and Currie were both acquitted with honour at their trials by court-martial in the following year, on the grounds that the limit up to which discipline could be maintained had been reached, and that no one could fairly be blamed for the men's disobedience.

4

The Royal Horse Artillery played a leading role in the battle, from the galloping panache of Maclaine's personal attack on the Lui-Naib's cavalry to Slade's organization of the rear during the retreat. Blackwood chose the gun position on which the brigade of infantry was finally deployed, but not by any means with that in mind at the time – he was looking for a place from which he could bring down effective fire on the enemy. Slade stood firm on the south side of the Mundabad Ravine as a rallying point behind which the cavalry could reform. In every phase of the artillery battle decisions were made and action taken.

The visibility was so bad that both sides operated under unusual difficulty, as shown by the fact that neither succeeded in putting a single opposing gun out of action by fire. The British had the additional disadvantage of the beleaguered garrison, in that they were compelled to engage moving targets distributed around them, while the Afghans were able to concentrate their fire inwards on to static guns. E/B was, moreover, in the open, while the Kizilbash colonel's guns made good use of existing cover, lending support to the maxim coined in a later campaign, that there is no such thing as a flat desert.

It was unfortunate that the smooth-bore battery, which had been in existence for all of a week, failed to keep count of ammunition expenditure. Why it should have been necessary to send the whole battery back to the ravine to look for more rounds we shall never know, but we can be sure that Slade never dreamed of the crucially bad effect that it would have on the native infantry, nor of the corresponding boost to Afghan morale.

Before the ghazis got among the guns, E/B had lost a quarter

of the men in the line. The withdrawal was standard procedure under the circumstances, the flanking infantry having gone on both sides; the guns were the coveted objective, and the focus for enemy attack from the east. At the battle of Ahmad Khel, the guns had withdrawn for as short a distance as two hundred yards to ease themselves of enemy pressure and avoid the risk of capture, before coming into action again. Slade had this precise distance in mind at first, and then decided that there was nothing to be gained by staying near the broken line, where there were at the time no signs of a rally for him to support.

From then on the conduct of the artillery throughout the retreat was praised unreservedly, both for assistance in disengaging from the enemy, and for devotion to the wounded. It was a triumph for Slade's unremitting effort that he brought his four remaining 9-pounder guns, and even one 6-pounder smooth-bore gun, back to Kandahar.

CHAPTER 12

Loose Ends

1

THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA had made an incredibly bad estimate of the cost of the war, and were in consequence smarting under popular and official condemnation. They were therefore all the more bitter about the Maiwand defeat and at the enormous loss of equipment and treasure, and the search for scapegoats was begun. Primrose was given an official rebuke for moving out of cantonments – which he could not possibly have held – and thereby permitting financial loss through large-scale looting and destruction. He was recalled, and nothing good could be said of the Bombay Army, though it was admitted grudgingly that the 66th Foot and the artillery had done quite well. Official despatches after the battle were considered so unsatisfactory that the authorities ordered every officer who had survived to write his own account of what he actually saw happen, the only exceptions being Malcolmson and Nuttall.

The narratives were completed before Christmas of that year while memories were still fresh, but were inevitably inclined to bias, and often gave quite different versions of the same episode.

Lord Ripon now decided to withdraw unconditionally his predecessor's guarantee of support to Wali Sher Ali Khan, and suggested to Amir Abdur Rahman that he might like to take back his unruly province. The Amir expressed qualified gratification but regretted that he would be unable to do any such thing until he had been provided with the necessary arms and equipment to hold it. So Simla hastily provided eighteen smooth-bore guns, three thousand rifles and fifty thousand rounds of small-arms ammunition. Only then was a new governor sent down from Kabul, and the British garrison of Kandahar was able to

march out, taking with them Sher Ali Khan, destined to spend the remainder of his days in India as a pensioner of the Government.

Next year, with all the resilience of the Afghan war-lord, Ayub Khan came forward again, defeated the Amir's troops at Girishk and was in occupation of Kandahar by the end of July. Abdur Rahman himself led an army south to evict him, and there was a stern battle around the city. In the end the Amir gained just sufficient advantage for large numbers of wavering troops to become convinced of the justice of his cause. They all rallied to him, changing sides when necessary, and helped him to achieve a resounding victory. Once more Ayub Khan lost everything. What was worse, he found on his return to Herat that Abdur Rahman had taken the precaution of capturing it during his absence, and that his own city was held against him. He fled to safe harbour in Persia, whence he emerged in later years to lead one more abortive revolt, only to be finally routed. So, getting on in years, he decided to retire from the active scene, and managed to have himself adopted by the Government of India as a political prisoner at large. Thirty years after his great victory over the British at Maiwand he was still living comfortably in Murree, a pleasant hill-station in the north Punjab. His brother, Yakub Khan, Amir until deposed after Cavagnari's murder, preferred to alternate his Indian dwellings between Mussoorie, another nice hill-station, and Dehra Dun until his death in 1925.

2

During the second Afghan War twenty-four British and sixty native infantry regiments had been involved directly, with five British and twenty-five native cavalry regiments.

In round numbers, a hundred British officers lost their lives. Of these, sixty were killed in battle or died of wounds, and forty succumbed to disease. Of those who died as a result of enemy action, a full half were due to the losses suffered by the Bombay Army at Maiwand and in the Deh Kwaja sortie. Brigadier-

General Daubney, who had been the only regimental commander to return from Deh Kwaja unharmed, died of smallpox in Kandahar before the evacuation. So did Major Oliver of the 66th Foot. Lieutenant Whittuck of the Bombay Grenadiers, a young officer who took part in the battle of Maiwand, died of dysentery on 6 September; he did not, therefore, live long enough to write a narrative – nor was he mentioned in those of his brother-officers.

After the loss of the 66th Foot's Colours at Maiwand and those of the 24th Foot at Isandhlwana to the Zulus in the previous year, it was decided that never again would a regiment take its Colours with it on active service, but would instead lay them up before departure. The 66th were presented with new Colours in 1882, and Lieutenant Bray was the officer to receive them. Lieutenant-Colonel Ready was in command of the regiment and remained so for another five years. It was rumoured that the captured Colours had been taken to Kharan, a fortress south-west of Quetta, whose chieftain had fought for Ayub Khan, and this was borne out by the fact that a British boundary commission party was not allowed within a hundred yards of the entrance gates when they visited the Khan in 1883. Political considerations, however, prevented Sir Robert Sandeman, in charge of the party, from making any approach to the Khan to restore the Colours, and it is believed that they were subsequently transferred elsewhere for safe keeping. Their present whereabouts is unknown.

The 66th Regiment of Foot became the Royal Berkshire Regiment, and are now part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment after an amalgamation. They fought next in the Suakin campaign, and then all over the world – with the greatest of credit. They still remember their link with the gunners of Maiwand. They were welcomed to his command in 1903 by Major-General Sir J. R. Slade, KCB, Commander-in-Chief, Egypt, in an address recalling the comradeship in adversity during that difficult twenty-four hours of the second Afghan War.

Quarry, of the 66th Foot, received his majority in 1881, and then disappears from the Army List. Major Faunce was District

Commandant, Cape Colony, in 1901 and retired in 1902, one year before Major Bray. Lynch's sword was found six years after the battle in the possession of an Afghan general, a refugee from Kabul. It was removed from him and returned to its proper owner. He himself fought in the Suakin campaign and retired to write his memoirs as a major. He left his blade to the regimental museum, where it is still to be seen. Bobby, sole survivor of the 66th's last stand at Khig, returned to England with his regiment, and Queen Victoria personally in 1881 hung the Afghan medal around his neck. He was accidentally killed next year, but continues to exist in the regimental museum, proudly wearing his campaign decoration.

E Battery of B Brigade, Royal Horse Artillery, became a Field Artillery Battery a few years after the battle, and are now a Commando Light Battery. Despite many changes of category and number they are always to be recognized by their honour title, Maiwand, and wear a specially designed Maiwand tie on occasions. They, too, served in many theatres of war and lived up to their reputation in the Second World War against German armour in the Western Desert. Once more the gun-towing vehicles appeared in the firing-line, but this time to bring up more ammunition and evacuate the wounded – no guns were withdrawn. The battery was overrun after the last gun had been silenced, but only after inflicting such heavy losses on the enemy that when the Afrika Corps tanks found that they still had the third battery of the regiment to overcome, they gave up and left the battlefield in British hands.

Fowell rose to the rank of colonel in the Royal Garrison Artillery and commanded the coastal defences of Malta as a last tour in 1901. Fowle became Inspector-General of Ordnance, India, in 1904 and held the appointment for seven years. Sergeant Mullane VC became a battery sergeant-major and retired on pension. Gunner Collis VC left the army for the Bombay Police, committed bigamy, and had his decoration withdrawn. Veterinary-Surgeon Oliver became District Veterinary Officer of Aldershot and retired as a lieutenant-colonel in 1885.

In 1962 General Maiwand of the Royal Afghan Army, Doyen of the Service Attachés in Moscow, dined with the Military

Attaché to the British Embassy, a former commander of the Maiwand Battery, to celebrate Maiwand Day.

Sir Donald Stewart became Commander-in-Chief, India, in 1881 and held the appointment for five years. He was made Field-Marshal in 1894 and died in 1900.

Brigadier-General Burrows was given every sympathy and support by his good friends in the Bombay Presidency, and was promoted to major-general within less than a year after Maiwand. He served on, commanding troops until he retired as senior major-general in the Bombay Army in 1886. Nuttall did not become a major-general until 1885, but went on to finish as a lieutenant-general on the staff in 1890. His orderly officer J. Monteith, went out as colonel in 1909. Hogg commanded the Poona Horse from 1883 to 1889, when he was appointed Quarter-master-General of the Bombay Army. He ended as major-general commanding the Poona Division, the position held by Primrose before he was uprooted and despatched unwillingly to Kandahar. He remained in the Service until early in 1914, thereby outlasting all the other officers who survived Maiwand. Leach was rewarded for his exploits in South Afghanistan with a brevet lieutenant-colonelcy, and was four times mentioned in despatches. He received two more mentions in his next campaign, Suakin in 1885, and a CB for gallantry at Tefrek Zareba. Towards the end of the year he was commanding a brigade which fought at Korosko and Assuan. Later he was given a division in Northern Ireland, then became Commander-in-Chief, Scotland. He was promoted general in 1910 and retired in 1912, to die in the following year.

Malcolmson and Currie were both acquitted with honour at their courts-martial in early 1881. Malcolmson retired soon afterwards, Currie was promoted to lieutenant-colonel in 1882, and then left the Service. From the Sind Horse, Smith left in 1884, A. M. Monteith in 1886, both as captains; Lieutenant-Colonel E. V. P. Monteith retired in 1903. The 3rd Light Cavalry eventually amalgamated with the Poona Horse and the latter title prevailed. Mayne was twice mentioned in despatches. He became a major in 1887, and after a course at the Staff College was appointed Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General, Poona Dis-

trict, in 1891. He then commanded the Governor of Bombay's Bodyguard until retirement. He died in 1910. Geoghegan replaced Owen as adjutant of the 3rd Light Cavalry, and graduated from the Staff College, Camberley, in 1889. After a staff appointment he returned to his regiment and became major and second-in-command in 1895. In 1897 he died suddenly from an abscess on the liver. His commanding officer considered him to be 'an irreparable loss. In his hands the future of the regiment would have been quite safe'. Reid left the Bombay Cavalry and returned to his own regiment; he became a colonel in 1904, and continued in that rank until 1913. Anderson of the Bombay Grenadiers climbed to great heights in Headquarters, Bombay Army, retiring as a general in 1903 after seven years in the rank. Aslett became a lieutenant-colonel in 1900 and left the Army in the same rank ten years later. Brave Doctor Kirtikar became a surgeon lieutenant-colonel in 1897, and retired in 1904. None of the combatant officers of Jacob's Rifles who fought at Maiwand remained in the Service after 1886, nor did any receive promotion.

In 1891 the Presidency Armies were all brought under the Central Command. Officers were thereafter classed as members of the Indian Staff Corps, and were renamed Indian Army in 1903. At the same time a decision was made at last to increase the regimental strength to nine officers.

In 1882, the breech-loading Armstrong gun came back into favour and was introduced into the British Army on a substantial scale.

CHAPTER 13

Maiwand Today

1

COLONEL NOEL, the Military Attaché, and I flew into Kandahar airport on a hot summer's morning, to be met by his chauffeur who had driven down from Kabul. We began our tour with a courtesy call on the Governor, a competent man of affairs fully conversant with all the details of his province, its resources and its shortages. Drinking tea with this gentleman and listening to him converse in perfect English, one could not help thinking of the unfortunate Wali Sher Ali Khan, and the pathetic picture of that prince in full ceremonial regalia and mounted on his gaily caparisoned steed, waiting in the bazaar to greet Sir Frederick Roberts, representative of the foreign power to whom he had pledged his faith. He had staked everything and was about to lose all.

The Governor wished us a pleasant journey, and we set out for Girishk, following the route taken by Burrows's column on its way to the Helmand. Through the villages from which the retreating Maiwand survivors had been harassed by jezail-fire, their dried-mud walls shining almost white in the morning sun; past Kokeran, where Brooke's little force met Nuttall and the Sind Horse; and where the wretched Maclaine lay wounded and imprisoned for several days; on to the Arghandab crossing by Sinjiri.

We looked up to our left at the steep hills from which the local villagers had rushed down to dispute the crossing, and had been driven back to the cover of their green scrub and trees. We drove over the modern bridge spanning the broad river-bed, looking down at the water-channels winding through gravel, stone banks and clumps of green willows, an occasional waft of cool

air on our faces momentarily contrasting the waves of heat reflecting from the rocky banks. Here it was that Mayne and his squadron of the 3rd Light Cavalry manned the crossing, waiting tiredly but confidently for Geoghegan and his rear party to walk in with the last little band of stragglers, listening to the musket and carbine fire growing closer.

On past Ashu-Khan, green trees reaching up from behind sun-baked walls, the Arghandab veering further and further to our left, now in early June nearly as dry as when Surgeon Dane crept along it to safety through the moonlight; out of the trees and across the plain to the dry bed of the Khushk-i-Nakhud River, over the bridge to the old fort. We climbed around it while the servants were refreshing themselves in a small roadside tea-house, and it was interesting to see how the upperworks were slowly disintegrating and how the mud eroded away by rain and storm was gradually trickling down to fill the lower barracks and store-rooms, one day to reduce what was once a proud fortress into a solid mound of baked mud, a fate which we were to see had already overtaken the fort of Maiwand.

Five miles on, the Garmao of Leach's day is now signed as Garm Ab in the Arabic script; then came the rolling plain of the desert, as we followed the ancient highway to Herat, now a good road. At intervals the emptiness would be broken by the walled enclave of a petrol station, or of a government administrative building. The heat increased with the afternoon and the gradual descent; we were grateful to be travelling in comfort, not plodding along on foot, regiments deep in white dust. After nearly forty miles of this it was pleasant to see the deep grey-blue channel of the Helmand River, which we followed south to the old fortified town of Kalabist, now more prosaically known as Bust.

After a hot and sticky night in an hotel we returned in the cool of the morning to Khushk-i-Nakhud, refuelled the servants with tea, and then turned north off the road along the track on the west bank of the river for Maiwand. This gravel road soon turned inland and then jinked north-east through lines of karezes, leaving the villages of Mashak and Karez-Ak on its left, past Mundabad and Khig until the tall minaret of the Afghan War

Cemetery and the ruined heap of the old fort came into view. Distances could only be judged approximately, as the Landrover speedometer read whole miles, rather than tenths of a mile. The maps were still derived mainly from Leach's survey, though a new operation was in progress and has probably been completed.

West of the ruins stands the memorial to the Afghan soldiers killed in the battle of Maiwand. A fine pillar crowned by a Muslim dome with star and crescent, standing in the midst of a garden of white mulberry trees, enclosed by a wall of brick and stone. In the garden are four hundred graves of Afghan warriors, regular soldiers and ghazis, each aligned towards Mecca, the mound topped with white-painted stones, and in most cases with a larger stone at head and foot. A decent distance apart in a small grove are the graves of senior officers and chieftains. The whole cemetery is beautifully kept, a truly gracious end to a desert pilgrimage.

The old caretaker came to meet us carrying between his hands a bowl of peaches, newly picked from his garden. 'May you never be tired!' he greeted us, and we replied with the protocol, 'May you never be poor!' We all moved under the shade of the mulberry trees, reaching up to pick the ripe fruit as we talked. I asked the old man whether there were any British graves in his care, but he said that there were none and that all trace of them had been lost. Nor did he know anything about the memorial cairn erected by the British burial parties on the battlefield during Brigadier-General Daubney's visit. But he pointed out to us the village of Khig three miles back along our approach road.

We thanked him for his courtesy, insisted on making a small donation in exchange for the peaches and remembered to return the bowl, which had disappeared into the back of our vehicle. Then off we went to the village, where we met an Afghan, indistinguishable from a tribesman of the North-West Frontier of India, except that he was not carrying a rifle. He was persuaded to admit that we were at Khig, and that the village now seen further south was indeed Mundabad. We were probably standing at the very spot where the last eleven British and native officers and soldiers had elected to sell their lives in the open, sallying out from the garden which they had held for so long.

We left the Landrover and walked around Khig to find the water-course on the ravine bank where Colonel Galbraith had rallied his men for their first stand, and where he himself had fallen. It is still well-suited to be a defensive work, six-foot banks of earth on each side enclosing a sheer ditch three feet wide and eight feet deep with a foot of water running along the bottom, and sited along the edge of the big, nearly dry ravine.

The steep banks at Mundabad made it seem impossible to cross at first sight, so we drove carefully down to Burrows's knoll, from which it was possible to see the long columns of trees and copses marching still from Garmao to Maiwand, which had so confused estimates of Ayub Khan's strength and order of march. Leach claimed that there were none; be that as it may, there are certainly some now! From the knoll it was also easy to locate a gentler crossing-place, most likely the one used by Maclaine and his guns, and so we drove on to the battlefield of 1880 without any further trouble.

It was seven weeks before the anniversary of the battle, and approaching midday. There was no breath of wind, and the flat, dry desert of gravel and thorn tussocks reflected the heat of the sun to a really horrible degree. Using copies of Talbot's sketch-map we drove slowly around the area looking for the storm-water courses which were the only features shown, apart from the villages. They were all to be found, and we had no difficulty in identifying the battle-line and the E/B gun position, where we stopped to brew some very necessary tea. No graves or cairn were to be seen. Visibility was fair, with a certain amount of shimmer in the distance, but no mirage. I could not see the nullah from which the two Afghan 3-pounder guns had done such execution, and where the ghazis had formed up for their rush to capture Maclaine's guns. The heat had a stultifying effect, and even though I had not made a five-mile march in the heat after a disturbed night, as had Burrows's men, it was so hot and enervating that I almost felt that it was not worth while to walk half a mile to see just another nullah. But I was able to convince myself that after all the years of waiting I really had no excuse for not going to see that the salient was where it was made out to be. Besides, I was slightly worried by a part of Currie's narra-

tive which stated, 'I hear that the engineer officers who surveyed the field afterwards noticed this deep but narrow nullah [the one into which he had seen the Lui-Naib's cavalry ride] but have not entered it on the sketch, as the scale is said to be too small. The omission of this makes the ghazis to have advanced seven hundred yards across the open, which I am certain they did not.'

So I set off on foot (unaccompanied!), carrying my camera and counting my steps, putting a small pebble in my pocket after each hundred paces had been completed, in case I should get muddled over how far I had gone. To my great surprise and interest, after the equivalent of only two hundred and seventy-five yards I found a large nullah, deeper than any of the others except for the one at Mundabad, forming a salient towards the gun position, with a steeply sloping bank twelve feet deep dropping down from the table of the plain to a gravelly bed, and then rising more gradually to a height slightly less on the other side. This gradual slope would have given excellent cover to guns and infantry, who would have had plenty of room, and no difficulty in siting themselves so that only the essential portions of their weapons and themselves could be seen above ground level. As expected, the northern continuation of the nullah from the salient carried on parallel to the British position, gently shallowing as it went.

Turning about to look at the British line I saw that the Land-rover on the gun position was silhouetted against the sky, clearly visible right down to where the wheels touched the ground. From where I stood the British guns and Mayne's cavalry would have been perfect targets, sitting birds to be shelled and shot at in perfect safety from a range of less than three hundred yards. So also would have been the infantry every time that they rose to fire, except for the 66th Foot, who had cover in the beginning of the next storm-course. The trajectories of any rounds missing their targets in the line would have followed the contour of the plain to the reserve areas, the gun-teams and Nuttall's cavalry beyond. Our troops had to submit to this for a whole hour, and even then the break occurred elsewhere – on the left flank, not opposite the salient.

On my return to the Landrover, I climbed up on it to see if

the nullah might possibly have been visible from on horseback, but was unable to discern it. The reason is that all these water-courses are formed originally when the tropical rain beats in a solid wall on the flat plain and tears away to lower ground. As it goes it tends to erode any part of the baked pottery of the plain which is slightly weaker than another, to form a gully, deeper every rainy season but absolutely flush with the surface at its banks, showing no break even from short distances.

The original field-sketch made by Talbot shows all the features of the area and all these storm-courses which so affected the battle. Nothing appears to have been left out, and nothing extra seems to have been inserted, no embellishments made. From his detail, it is still easy to find the battle line, and all the other places mentioned in the many narratives. But how can one explain the reason for the distance between the gun areas and the salient opposite, both of which can be located beyond doubt, being less than three hundred yards, as opposed to five hundred yards as shown on the sketch?

However differently Talbot's horse may have trotted under varying conditions, this could not have accounted for so great a discrepancy from fact. Another possibility is that he established the distance correctly, and gave his work to Leach, who was to produce the map of the battlefield. Leach would have seen at once that the distance from the gun position to the nullah differed radically from the assessments by all of the survivors except Currie – who apparently did not count – and of young Lynch in the 66th, who could not be taken as an authority. Leach's own estimate was about five hundred yards, Burrows's was up to a figure of seven hundred. From there it would have been easy to point out that the generally agreed amount of about six hundred yards was almost exactly double Talbot's calculation, and it could be assumed that he had probably made a simple mathematical error in conversion. His distance was doubled, therefore, and the map drawn accordingly, showing a distance of five hundred and fifty yards from gun position to nullah. It is interesting to see how half this figure – two hundred and seventy-five yards – corresponds with my paced estimate.

On the return trip to Kandahar we tried to climb the ravine

at Mundabad, roughly where Blackwood descended earlier on the day of the fight, and succeeded in doing so after a rather precarious passage, involving everyone dismounting except the driver. The villagers of Mundabad, peaceful and unarmed, smiled and waved at us as we drove through the village. Next day we took the main road to Kabul, a good tarmac highway winding through the hills past Khelat-i-Ghilzai, where two companies of the 66th unwillingly sat out the siege of Kandahar; and through Ghazni – where Ayub Khan never went after all!

In Kabul I was most royally entertained by Brigadier-General Suleiman, a royal prince and old friend, and met a number of local officials. I asked one of them if the government had now disarmed the villagers and tribesmen, as I had seen no rifles on my trip. He told me that all arms should have been surrendered, but that the rule had not been enforced, and the tribes still had their weapons. They were not carried openly but were hidden in roofs, or bricked-up in walls for use in an emergency. No firm measures had been taken to find and collect them, because such a programme would have been difficult to implement – to say the least. He laughed and added, 'In any case, the threat of an armed peasantry in Afghanistan is now so well appreciated abroad that not even the British will ever dare invade us again!'

APPENDIX A

The Maiwand Dead and Wounded

1

As with everything else regarding Maiwand, casualty statistics vary from one report to another. The table that has been adopted and attached at Annexure 1 shows that of the 2565 officers and men who marched to battle from Khushk-i-Nakhud on 27 July, 962 died before reaching Kandahar, while 161 were brought in wounded. They had killed five times as many of the enemy, a Pyrrhic victory for Ayub Khan, who could not have afforded many such successes.

But these figures do little more than indicate that the Maiwand brigades had indeed been in severe trouble, and are no help with such problems as trying to achieve unbiased estimates for the number of Bombay Grenadier casualties in killed and wounded before the line gave way, compared to those of the other two infantry regiments. It is, however, possible to enter into very much more detail by exploiting such extracts from Daubeney's records as are still available. The additional data evolved break the statistics down into killed and wounded before the line gave way, then during the withdrawal from the battlefield to Mundabad and Khig, and finally for the fighting in the villages. After that it is a comparatively simple step to assess losses incurred along the route of the retreat to Kandahar.

The question posed is broadly answered by studying the map of graves at page 170 together with the table at Annexure 2, and noting that 80 dead lie behind the Grenadier position in the line, and only 15 behind that of the 66th Foot. Figures elicited from detailed investigation of the casualties have been used in the preceding chapters, but as some of them may be considered controversial, the methods by which they have been obtained are outlined in this appendix.

Brigadier-General Daubeney's column found the bodies of approximately 665 officers and men killed before the disengagement from Khig and Mundabad; they can be divided into three main categories.

Firstly, men actually killed in the line before it broke; seriously wounded men unable to make their own way to the rear, and for whom no stretchers could be found, who would have been left lying in or near their regimental aid posts until slain by the triumphant advancing enemy; and those seriously wounded evacuated during the early stages of the battle to the field hospital in the Mundabad ravine, only to die there of their injuries.

Secondly, those killed during the withdrawal to the villages, and the stands made on the way to Mundabad and in Khig.

And thirdly, members of the baggage guard, and those seriously wounded and abandoned in the field hospital's last position south of Mundabad.

To allot these casualties to units, it is necessary to analyse each grave shown in the diagram at page 170.

Graves 1-3 can only contain the bodies of Lieutenant Cole and his men, of those Grenadiers who fell in the line before it broke and those killed in that period of fatalistic indecision described by Leach before the withdrawal began. Taking a balance between Leach's description and the rather less dramatic statements made by officers of the regiment, it has been assessed that 15 men were killed in the latter category, leaving 65 who fell in the line. The Grenadiers had 470 men in the line, and Cole only 100; so if the dead are divided proportionately the Grenadiers would have had 54 killed in the line, and Cole 11. The contents of graves 1-3 can therefore be allotted as 11 to Cole, 54 to the Grenadiers before the line broke, and 15 while disorganized.

It is obvious that these figures can in no way be taken as proven; they and subsequent calculations have been carried out only with the aim of getting some indication of what might have happened. A table showing the holding in each grave and its subdivision to units is at Annexure 2.

Grave 4 is described by Surgeon-Major Dane: 'I found in a slight depression in the ground about 200 yards behind and to the right of the regiment, 15-20 Grenadiers and a few Europeans all severely wounded.' He was trying to get stretchers for them when the Royal Horse Artillery galloped out of action, and he too had

to leave. The Europeans mentioned can only have been gunners, there were no others in the vicinity. This is the specific example of the category where seriously wounded men had to be abandoned to be killed by ghazis. Similar proportions of abandoned and murdered wounded have been applied to other regiments about whom no such firm evidence has been procurable.

Graves 5-6 would be casualties to Mayne's squadron, both in the line and charging around the Grenadiers, artillery drivers in the wagon lines, and Grenadiers killed during the pursuit. It has been assumed that the survivors of Cole's companies got clear away. Here also may be Captain Heath, Burrows's brigade major.

Grave 7 is sited behind the position held by the main body of Jacob's Rifles, and the body count agrees with estimates made later by officers of the regiment. A few of Cole's badly wounded may have been evacuated to here.

Graves 8-9 contain men of the 66th Foot killed before the break; and men of all three regiments in equal proportion when jumbled together in confusion.

Daubeney states that during the withdrawal from the field 52 Europeans and 92 natives were killed, a total of 144. To reach this figure he appears to have excluded Graves 10 and 17, and included Graves 11-16 and 18-33, making 145. This minor discrepancy can be disregarded, as the totals in the graves seem to have been rounded off - unless the Afghan peasantry kept meticulously within their tens, which is unlikely.

Grave 10 was, therefore, considered to be men who had fallen in the line, and would have contained soldiers of the 66th.

Graves 11-16 are likely to have been cavalry casualties - mostly Monteith's, but some from Reid, Owen and Smith, both in the line and charging; others may be from the smooth-bore battery and more withdrawing Grenadiers.

The close group of three large graves numbered 17 must contain bodies of men killed in a stand, unless this is the sole exception to the Afghan policy of moving bodies the minimum distance for burial. Daubeney must have thought that they were killed in a position which was part of the line, as he does not include these 70 bodies in his figure for men killed in the withdrawal from the battlefield. They would have been Grenadiers, as all of Jacob's Rifles and the 66th left in the direction of Khig.

Graves 18-25 are interesting. Nobody was there during the battle, and the area seems to have been clear of the enemy at least until

after three o'clock, when Burrows passed through on his way to Khig after speaking with Currie and Nuttall; certainly, there can have been no major battle raging there at the time. They must again have been Grenadiers, as no one else went that way. Perhaps they were Grenadiers who stood at Graves 17, then made a break for Mundabad but were caught after 200 yards, dispersed and slain.

Graves 26-33 mark the route of the 66th Foot, Jacob's Rifles and not more than 50 Grenadiers, to Khig. Casualties have been allotted to conform with Daubeney's figures for the withdrawal, and roughly in proportion to those involved.

Beresford-Pierse identified the bodies in Graves 34-35 as those of Colonel Galbraith, two of his officers and 59 of his men (plus one more?) who fell defending the water-course on the Khig side of the ravine.

Grave 36 is not marked on the original map, other than as the Second Stand, but is described elsewhere as being on the Khig side of the ravine, over the wall of the first garden, and in defence of a small stream. In it, lightly buried, were Henn, both of his European NCOs and twelve of his sappers; 23 of the Grenadiers and 46 soldiers of the 66th.

Grave 37 is in the last garden, and holds those who fell there and in the final fight outside. They are mostly from the 66th, but include some Jacob's Rifles and Grenadiers, and Major Blackwood.

The total in the graves at Annexure 2 comes to 630 bodies. An additional allowance of 35 has been made to cover bodies which must have been elsewhere in the area, but which have not been recorded; this has been subdivided into 15 for those who died or were abandoned in hospital, and 20 deaths among the 300 riflemen of the baggage guard. It has been assumed that most of the sick were brought away, as they would have been in their doolies or still in their kajawas, with bearers or animals allotted to them since the beginning of the day, when they were brought from Khushk-i-Nakhud.

3

The figures for those wounded in various stages of the battle have been assessed by analogy from Bombay Grenadier casualties, about which there is more evidence than for any other unit. Assumptions have to be broad, but the aim is purely to establish a general idea on a reasonable basis, rather than have nothing on which to conjecture. For a start, we know from official statistics that 61 wounded

Grenadiers reached Kandahar. This number would have been made up firstly from men wounded in the line—the commanding officer said in his narrative that many of them returned safely. Secondly, from those wounded by sword, bullet – or shell, as was Anderson – during the withdrawal from the field; the only indication here is the numbers killed during this phase, ignoring those who fought to the last in the stands, whose wounded would have been killed with them. Killed hesitating, or on the way to Mundabad, has been estimated at 36, so a figure of 25 for walking wounded is unlikely to be an over-estimate. However, of these 25 at least 10 would have dropped by the wayside during the retreat to Kandahar, exhausted by loss of blood and thirst, leaving only 15 to walk or be carried through the gates. Thirdly, the few who would have been hit by fire from the villagers between Ashu-Khan and Abasabad – not many, as flank guards kept the Afghans away from the main column, and marksmanship was bad. But there was a lot of firing, and about 5 men may have been hit, all of whom were probably brought into the city.

Adding the last two figures together and subtracting from 61, we get 41 survivors of those wounded in the line reaching safety. Others hit in the line and evacuated would also have died on the way back, although a smaller proportion, as their wounds would have been dressed properly, and they would have been given water to drink in the hospital before all the trouble started; perhaps 15 in all. Also in the total of those wounded in the line before the break we must include men evacuated successfully to the field hospital, but who died there despite treatment, and the miserable few who were abandoned alive in the hospital area when the rearguard pulled out from Mundabad; in the case of this regiment, possibly 2 in the first category and 5 in the second. Finally, the 24 men for whom no stretchers could be found, and whose bodies lie in Grave 4.

This comes to a total of 87 Bombay Grenadiers wounded in the line, which, added to the amount of 54 killed, gives total casualties of 141 out of 470 men in the line, or about 30 per cent.

The proportion of killed to wounded may appear at first sight to be large, but this can be accounted for by the fact that most of the early casualties were due to artillery ball or shard, which would have been more likely to kill or inflict severe wounds, rather than the number of minor injuries which usually tend to boost statistics. On no occasion while still in the line were the Grenadiers subjected to volleys of rifle-fire.

We now have figures for those killed and wounded in the fighting up to the disengagement from the villages, and some idea of the numbers wounded in the retreat. Estimates can therefore be made for those who died, or were killed on the way back to Kandahar, by subtracting from the number of 962 who never arrived.

An uncertain factor is provided by the men of the Grenadiers and Jacob's Rifles who lost their way and were killed during the night of 28–29 July while trying to come in over the Baba Wali Pass. We know that they were not accompanied by any of the 66th Foot, whose losses on the retreat can be calculated – which can be taken as a basis for Grenadier and Jacob's Rifles figures. Possibly the native soldiers might be expected to have slightly less stamina, as they received no official meat ration, as did British troops, but had to buy their own from their meagre pay; some also were recruits, who had not reached their full strength. Knowing the number who started on the retreat, and subtracting losses slightly larger than those of the 66th, approximate strengths for the Baba Wali parties can be obtained.

A complete summary of Grenadier casualties is at Annexure 6. Tables for casualties suffered by all units in the line before it broke, after the break and around Khig, and during the retreat to Kandahar are at Annexures 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

5

Losses among the followers occurred almost entirely during the retreat to Kandahar, and the proportion is high.

The follower was unarmed, except with a short sword on occasions, so it was not necessary to kill him for his rifle and ammunition. During the great retreat from Kabul in 1842 the tribesmen had been content to strip them of their clothing and leave them naked in the snow – they died just the same. But on this occasion the villagers were killing everybody without distinction, if they could. One milk-woman was taken prisoner and subsequently handed back to Daubeney at Sinjiri, but few if any others were as lucky.

The follower is imbued with a great sense of preservation and little false pride, which has served him well even in recent campaigns, but he normally lacks physical strength. He is usually undernourished, particularly during the earlier wars, when he had to

provide his own rations – there was no official allotment. Because of this weakness and an innate sense of inferiority, although all the followers should have been able to find water at Mundabad (except for those marooned in the fighting area), they would have fared badly indeed at Hauz-i-Madat. Many would have given in to their sufferings and crawled away to die or be killed.

Of the 2000 to 3000 followers with the Maiwand brigades, 331 camp followers were lost and 7 brought in wounded. Of the transport followers, 455 failed to return, but many of these were locally recruited and may have quietly made their ways back to their own homes, some with their animals. The Royal Horse Artillery battery started with 319 followers, and lost 107. Numbered among these were 18 grooms, 54 grass-cutters – gatherers of forage for the horses – and 17 stretcher-bearers.

6

Last of all, it may be of interest to some readers to examine the casualty figures for horses and transport animals. Detailed statistics are at Annexure 7, which show how the cavalry lost more than a third of their horses on the battlefield, and the Royal Horse Artillery nearly half their strength.

Well over two thousand transport animals failed to return to Kandahar.

ANNEXURE 1

OFFICIAL STATISTICS FOR CASUALTIES TO THE MAIWAND FORCE,

27-28 July, 1880

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Full strength</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>Percentage casualties to full strength</i>
Grenadiers	649	366	61	427	66
Jacob's Rifles	624	238	30	268	43
66th Foot	473	268	20	288	61
E/B RHA	146	21	13	34	23
Smooth-bores	43	9	6	15	35
3rd Light Cavalry	315	27	18	45	14
Sind Horse	260	14	5	19	7
Sappers	46	18	7	25	54
Staff	9	1	1	2	22
	2565	962	161	1123	44

Note: The figures for E/B RHA include data for 17 men attached to the Smooth-bore Battery.

ANNEXURE 2

THE BODIES IN THE GRAVES

<i>Graves</i>	1-3	4	5-6	7	8-9	10	11-16	17	18-25	26-30	31-33	34-35	36	37	X	TOTAL
<i>No. of bodies</i>	80	40	30	40	20	5	30	70	40	60	15	63	84	53	35	
Grenadiers	69	24	10	—	5	—	6	70	40	5	—	—	23	4	13	269
Cole's Coys	11	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	16
Rest of Jacob's Rifles	—	—	—	36	5	—	—	—	—	15	6	—	—	5	7	74
66th Foot	—	—	—	—	10	5	—	—	—	40	9	63	46	43	10	226
E/B RHA	—	9	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	16
Smooth-bores	—	5	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8
3rd Light Cavalry	—	—	15	—	—	—	9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	26
Sind Horse	—	—	—	—	—	—	12	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	12
Sappers	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	15	—	—	17
Staff	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
TOTAL																665

Notes: (a) It is most unlikely that the Afghan labour force buried to an exact count; the figures for Graves 1-30 were probably rounded off by the burial parties. But Beresford-Pierse was probably meticulous with his own regimental body-count in Graves 34-37.

(b) Column X represents those killed from among the baggage guard, and patients abandoned in the field hospital area, for which there are no records.

ANNEXURE 3

CASUALTIES IN THE BATTLE LINE BEFORE THE BREAK

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Battle line strength</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Seriously wounded, not evacuated</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>Percentage casualties to line strength</i>
Grenadiers	470	54	24	63	141	30
Cole's Coys	100	11	4	12	27	27
Rest of Jacob's Rifles	300	26	11	29	66	22
66th Foot	364	8	2	4	14	4
E/B RHA	100	8	2	18	28	28
Smooth-bores	42	4	1	6	11	26
3rd Light Cavalry	200	19	3	18	40	20
Sind Horse	100	7	3	5	15	15
Sappers	46	2	—	3	5	11
Staff	9	1	—	2	3	33
TOTAL	1731	140	50	160	350	20
Whole of Jacob's Rifles	400	37	15	41	93	23

ANNEXURE 4

CASUALTIES AFTER THE BREAK AND AROUND KHIG

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
				<i>casualties to line strength</i>
Grenadiers	191	25	216	46
Jacob's Rifles	38	21	59	15
66th Foot	216	28	244	67
E/B RHA	6	—	6	6
Smooth-bores	3	2	5	12
3rd Light Cavalry	4	5	9	5
Sind Horse	2	3	5	5
Sappers	15	6	21	46
Staff	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	475	90	565	33

Note: Baggage Guard and Hospital deaths are not included; they are at Annexure 2.

ANNEXURE 5

CASUALTIES DURING THE RETREAT TO KANDAHAR

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Killed, died, missing</i>	<i>Killed at Baba Wali</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>Percentage casualties to full strength</i>	<i>Percentage casualties to those who began the retreat</i>
Grenadiers	50	47	5	102	16	26
Jacob's Rifles	50	98	7	155	25	29
66th Foot	42	—	3	45	10	18
E/B RHA	5	—	1	6	4	5
Smooth-bores	1	—	1	2	5	6
3rd Light Cavalry	1	—	3	4	1	1
Sind Horse	2	—	—	2	1	1
Sappers	1	—	1	2	4	7
Staff	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	152	145	21	318	12	17

ANNEXURE 6

CASUALTIES SUFFERED BY THE BOMBAY GRENADIERS

In the Line

Killed	54
Killed in Regimental Aid Post	24
Wounded evacuated, or walking	63

Withdrawal from the Field

Killed hesitating	15
Killed withdrawing to Mundabad	21
Killed in the Grenadier Stands	110
Killed withdrawing to Khig	5
Killed in the Khig Gardens	27
Died in Field Hospital	2
Abandoned in Field Hospital	5
Baggage Guard killed	6
Wounded	25

Retreat to Kandahar

Died of wounds received in Battle	25
Killed or died from other causes	25
Killed at Baba Wali	47
Wounded and brought in	5

ANNEXURE 7

CASUALTIES TO HORSES AND TRANSPORT ANIMALS

<i>Unit</i>	<i>On the battlefield</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Destroyed exhausted or wounded</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
3rd Light Cavalry	200	58	29	42	100
Sind Horse	100	39	39	17	56
E/B	136	67	50	33	100

A detailed breakdown for E/B's losses is available, and is shown for the sake of interest :

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Officers' chargers	Killed in action	5	
	Wounded	2	
Battery horses	Killed		62

Died from wounds and/or exhaustion	5
Shot for wounds or exhaustion	11
Shot for wounds in Kandahar	8
Wounded and survived	7

The enemy are reported to have lost 700 horses.

Transport Losses—failed to return to Kandahar

Camels	1676
Ponies	355
Mules	24
Donkeys	291
Bullocks	79

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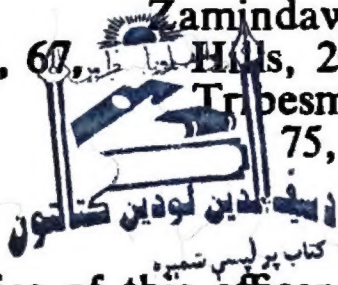
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Notes

- Photographs and biographies of this officer, and of all other officers who lost their lives during the war are to be found in *The Afghan Campaigns of 1878-80* by S. H. Shadbolt.
- Photograph among the list of Victoria Cross winners in Shadbolt. (See above.)
- Photograph in *Forty-one Years in India* by Lord Roberts.
- Photograph in *From Midshipman to Field-Marshal* by Sir Evelyn Wood.
- Photograph/Portrait in *Field-Marshal Sir Donald Stewart* by G. R. Elsmie.
- The Illustrated London News* has printed a number of battle scenes, field sketches and portraits in the following editions:
1879 (1) 4 January, (2) 3 May, (3) 14 June.
1880 (4) 7 August, (5) 14 August, (6) 21 August, (7) 28 August, (8) 4 September, (9) 30 October.

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